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MR. ZINZAN OF BATH;

OR,

SEEN IN AN OLD MIRROR.

A NOVEL.

BY

MARY DEANE.

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THIS NEW EDITION OF

A STORY OF BATH IN THE DAYS OF GEORGE II.

IS

Dedicated

TO

EDMOND R. WODEHOUSE, ESQ., M.P.,

WHOSE INTEREST IN ALL THAT CONCERNS THE ANCIENT CITY INCLUDES

THE PAST AS WELL AS THE PRESENT;

WITH THE WISH, ON THE PART OF THE WRITER,

THAT HE MAY LONG CONTINUE

TO REPRESENT IT AS ITS SENIOR MEMBER.

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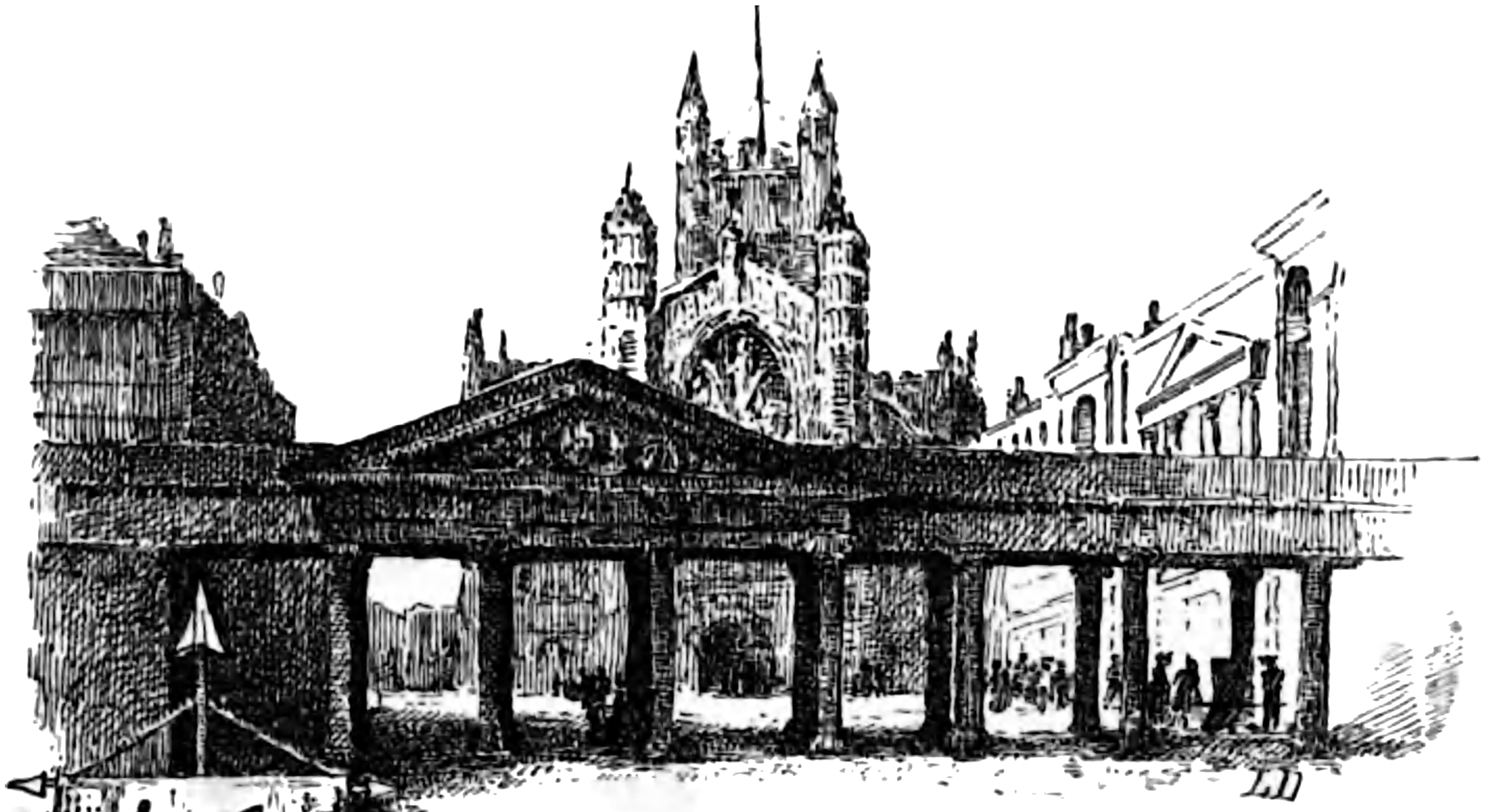
CHAPTER I.

THROUGH THE CITY GATE.



FROM beneath the rustling brown mantle of dead leaves shed from a hundred and seventy autumns, comes back a bright August to tell one of those thousand stories that bloom and fade with every year. "The Bath" of George the Second's time was still a mere collection of crooked streets and alleys, though, if we may trust to tradition, Fashion had come to be boiled in its hot springs, and refresh her yellow skin and haggard eyes with steaming draughts, from King Bladud's time downwards. Under the mean shops and lanes of the city lay mosaic pavements and Roman villas and stone coffins, telling of the days

when Roman legionaries were quartered in "Aquæ Solis." The mark of the invaders remained, while every trace of the health and pleasure seekers of later years had vanished along the green valley of the Avon.

Autumn was a gay time for Bath in the reigns of the Georges, and crowds of notabilities flocked through its four gateways to fill their own houses or the indifferent lodgings prepared for them. Few of the latter had as yet soared above coarse dimity and fustian furniture, "which the matrons and maids of the city flower between the seasons." Cane and rush bottomed chairs were deemed good enough to receive creakingly the weight of noble dowagers, lords, and big-wigs; carpetless floors, browned with wort and small beer, echoed the tap of heels the circumference of a sixpence, and were swept by trains of silk and satin, stiff, and glistening with mallowed richness. Many of these poor dwellings of greatness look out upon the old Abbey, whose western front is so blocked up with houses, that Oliver King's headless angels, tumbling recklessly down the dream ladders, had been more than once mistaken for toads. The city crouches at the feet of the great surrounding hills, up whose steeps it has not yet climbed itself in white crescents, gemming the wooded heights like pearls in dark hair. The Avon runs clear and low, reflecting the passing clouds, as yet unpolluted by poisonous factory dyes. The meadows along its banks are dotted of an afternoon with bright groups of stragglers from the pleasure walks where the band plays. On the "Rampiers" the strollers are busily discussing new arrivals, new scandals, one another's fortunes, failures, good luck at cards, and bad taste in dress. The old flat-bottomed ferry-boat is continually in request with those who prefer enjoying each other's company in the quiet meadows, away from the cold eyes and bitter tongues of the crowd. It made a pretty little picture as the withered old ferry-man pulled it slowly across the stream, with its brilliant freight. There was no lack of folly anywhere, but among the young people in the green fields it was, perhaps, less hateful than among the life-long toilers of the world assembled on the terraces, whose capabilities of love and generosity seemed hopelessly encrusted with selfishness. Theirs was the vulgar-mindedness, the hard polish of flippant, clever shallowness peculiar to one development of mind in the eighteenth century. The thin crust said to lie between Bath and the pit of fire and brimstone might well have quivered and cracked beneath the multitude of gilded heels which pressed it. If angels there were, they did indeed walk unawares.

It was not a true, nor a noble age, but one of tinsel and false affectation; men of the upper classes were for the greater part brutal, or effeminate, or wise with a poor imitation of the wisdom of heathen philosophers; religion was lying in a deadly lethargy; the hedges of the vineyard were broken down; neither upon their buildings, their poetry, their pictures, or their lives, was to be found the stamp of truth, purity, and nobility. Now and again arose some coarse, bitter, mocking protest against the rottenness of the age; and yet the nation was not cankered to the core, like its neighbour over the water, and would one day right itself again, shaking off the hideous mask, without the agony and shame of a revolution.

This particular autumn in Bath was supposed to be a good season; the weather was remarkably fine, so was the company; the much-used furniture got rubbed up; the doctors were in bland expectation of many fees; the assembly houses began to prepare their lists of entertainments. If faithfully followed out, the programme for the day left little to be desired among those who came tired of their own company, for every hour was provided for. At one time the nobility had kept themselves apart from the ordinary throng of country gentlemen and military and naval officers, but times had changed, and Bath was a small place, and now they frequented the same room, drank from the same pump, and strolled upon the same terraces. The Princess Amelia, or Emily, as she was indifferently called, was honouring the city with her presence; she had been met at the north gate by a hundred armed young men, and a hundred amazons, and escorted in high pomp, and amid the clangour of abbey bells, and the cheers of the populace, who were always liable to a craze at the sight of royalty, to her house in Westgate Street. Nash, great monarch of Bath, received her regally; his dashing chariot and brilliant outriders were in attendance wherever she went, competing with her in splendour, and outdoing her in eccentricity. Poor Beau Nash! he served the world faithfully, and its rewards were poverty and neglect; but if he has left the reputation of a king of folly, there stands a hospital as a memorial of his benevolence; starving wretches blessed his open heart and hand, and his little nook of society had to thank him for the decency and order which reigned among those who owned no sway but his. Wisdom came down from Westminster, Wit from the coffee-houses, Fashion from St. James's, and Nash, from his house in St. John's Court, ruled them all.

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while the sun sank lower and lower into rising mists, came a lumbering travelling-coach, well attended, and containing three persons, Lady Chesney, her brother Mr. Bellingham, and her daughter Dolly, from Spincourt, in Hampshire.

It was the first visit of the young lady, and all the hours in which she had been crowded up in the heavy coach her thoughts had been delightfully busy with the beautiful things she was going to see—old beaus and belles, for instance, drinking the waters in wigs and patches, and narrow, dirty streets—instead of stretches of mossy turf, gemmed thick with dewdrops, tangles of creepers flushed by August sun, and crowds of pigeons, and all manner of pets, flocking at her call. She had been counting the hours until her new fairyland should burst upon her, though just at the moment of quitting her dearly-loved home her heart had suddenly failed her. Mr. Bellingham had complained a good deal of the jolting and cramp of the long journey, but he cheered up when they passed beneath the gate decorated by the meagre statue of the swineherd prince, in reference to which was written—

"Ungrateful city, whose unworthy care
Cannot afford King Bladud clothes to wear!"

and was radiant when, alighting in the Abbey Litten, he welcomed his sister and niece to that most delectable and distinguished spot of earth, "The Bath." The Abbey bells deafened them, and the city waits kept them awake that night with the utmost attention, for both of which compliments Mr. Bellingham paid next morning with complete satisfaction.

In the present generation they were little known to "the world," but the time had been when the old gentleman, whose shaky gait still preserved some of its ancient stateliness, had fluttered his hour with the giddiest of them all. Pall Mall and St. James's had forgotten him now, however, and he shook his be-wigged head, and raised his fine eyebrows in melancholy disdain over the German dynasty sitting in the place of those old royal Stuarts, to whom he clung with traditional loyalty. He had never shone as a star of any great magnitude in their cause, nor had the exiled race any special reason for congratulating themselves upon his adherence; but Bellinghams had fought at Naseby, spilt their blood on Marston Moor, and died at Worcester in their cause; and the few years he had passed at St. Germains he had been treated with respect and confidence. Concerning

those years he was ever silent, and soon flitted back to spend the remainder of his life at his place at Spincourt, cheered by the society of his sister and niece. With all his foibles he carried into the country a fund of intelligence and information singular among the scattered rustic gentry. In the lifetime of her husband Lady Chesney had been much about court, but since his death she had devoted herself to the education of her daughter in great retirement. When she came to Bath the neighbourhood missed their Lady Bountiful, but there were many who stood in awe of her as a fine town-bred dame, and only regretted her absence as causing the house to be shut up.

"She must be learned, forsooth," they said, "and is not content that her daughter should have the useful proper training of other folks' children, as handsome and well-born as any Chesney, but must cram her silly head with book-learning, instead of bustling her about the still-room and dairy, which was the only way of curing girls of whimsies."

Poor Dolly, her book-learning was limited enough, if they had only known it, and she was not altogether deficient in household knowledge, but her real sin was her unconscious refinement. Then the mothers of awkward giggling misses would also prognosticate that when Dame Chesney thought of marrying Dolly she would find out her mistake, "for men did not want wives talking about books that, what with their sports and their property, they had no time to look into themselves." Lady Chesney was calmly unconcerned by these opinions; rather than that Dolly should be the wife of one of those ignorant, boorish squires, no better than their own gamekeepers, she should braid St. Katharine's hair. But seriously she did not intend to spoil her daughter's prospects by burying her in the country, and had kept up a correspondence with all her old friends who had eligible sons, with a view to Dolly's future establishment. Many a night she had lain awake revolving in her mind some glowing description of these young gentlemen; and at length it so happened that the two of whom she was disposed to think most favourably were in Bath at the same time. A timely touch of rheumatism, and an invitation from her brother, decided her, and the result was this autumnal visit to Bath.

Mr. Bellingham opened the campaign by an early visit to the pump-house, where he added his party to the list of arrivals, and had the pleasure of taking a glass of warm water flavoured with inky steel pens, in company with several old friends, well primed with the latest gossip.

CHAPTER II.

UNDER BAUBLE SWAY.

WHEN Dolly awoke on that first morning it was to a new epoch in her existence. Before her spread that mysterious future in which all delightful things were possible. Bath was as it were the battle-field upon which the young knight was to win his spurs, the scroll upon which future happiness might be emblazoned. Never again would the same ignorant, innocent, careless Dolly Chesney return to the old childish pleasures, the simple monotonous life that closed its pages for ever when she took her last look backward to the glades of Spincourt. Perhaps it was a blind presentiment of this which struck a chord of half-regretful melancholy in her mind as she turned away. At ten o'clock they started in the cumbrous family coach to see the town, which to Dolly was truly a wonderful sight. If she had not been conscious that her mother's

eye was upon her she certainly would have not restrained her feelings and behaved as well as she did. They subscribed to the ladies' reading-room, gazed into all the shops, noted the celebrities whom Mr. Bellingham was careful to point out, and went down Westgate Street to admire the exterior of Princess Amelia's house. Then they drove into the ring, a miniature of that in Hyde Park; and had the pleasure of bowing to her buxom Royal Highness, and of recognizing one or two friends. But here Lady Chesney was destined to receive a great shock. She had no notion of a lady being more of a horsewoman than would enable her to ride pillion behind her husband on a sober-paced beast to church or market town; and lo! here were young women prancing about on horseback, clad in broad-tailed coats with lappets, and low-crowned felt hats after the fashion of men! She looked at Dolly, hoping that she, too, was shocked at this unfeminine abomination, and was alarmed to see her watching with looks of unfeigned admiration.

"There is nothing sadder," said Lady Chesney, decisively, "than to see young women forget what is due to themselves. What are the mothers of these masculine young females thinking of, I wonder, that such proceedings should be countenanced?"

Then Dolly knew that she ought to have been scandalized and was not; and they speedily drove away, though Mr. Bellingham tried to speak a word in behalf of the culprits; for where beauty and fashion were concerned he was most lenient.

With the inclination to find much to see and admire the time passed swiftly, and Dolly was sorry when they had to return home. She stationed herself at the window with her prim bit of tent-stitch in her hand, as an excuse for watching all that was passing outside. Gaily-painted sedan-chairs were being carried about by powdered footmen, or hired men with long coat tails buttoned back, and faces not of the soberest description. Street cries of every ear-torturing nature came faintly from the market-place; and sometimes a market-woman bustled along with two immense baskets, wearing the frilled white cap and black beaver hat covered with wide satin bows, which might still have been seen some hundred years later. At the end of the street she could hear the barking, yelping, and snapping of three hundred crooked-leg turnspit dogs, toilers in the kitchens of the city, which were in the habit of congregating daily in the market-place for a little bragging, complaining, and comparing notes among friends

concerning, no doubt, the joints they had been laboriously turning that morning. Dolly's ideas were being enlarged every minute, but something yet remained. There flashed into the Abbey Litten, while the turnspits were still engaging her attention, a brilliant gilt chariot on high wheels, with six fine greys in showy caparison, accompanied by two outriders in yellow and scarlet, and preceded by one blowing a horn. Dolly begged her mother to come and see the sight.

"'Tis doubtless Mr. Nash, daughter, the King of Bath," said Lady Chesney. "A strange fashion of going abroad, truly! Come away from the window, or he will think you a mere country-bred lass."

"I should have supposed that only His Majesty himself would go about in so fine a mode," said Dolly.

In a few minutes Mr. Nash entered to pay his respects to her ladyship. His costume matched his equipage; it was *outré* to the last degree. He welcomed the ladies with effusion to his little kingdom, and scattered perfumed snuff on all sides. Dolly soon found that Bath was the most important place in the world, and Nash the most important personage in Bath. Lady Chesney began to feel herself much behind the world; her visitor took the burden of the conversation upon himself; a bow in the right place and general acquiescence was all that was needed on her part. He talked vauntingly of Wood's new buildings, sketched the programme for the week, hoped he should have the felicity of securing Miss Chesney's hand for the second minuet at the Tuesday ball, mentioned airily that he opened the ball with the princess on Tuesdays and Thursdays, but that he devoted the second dance to the last young lady of quality introduced, as he thought it an agreeable mode of bringing her before the world; ran through the names of the celebrities now in Bath, and inquired anxiously if they had seen Her Royal Highness yet, and appeared relieved to find that they had.

"I esteem the Abbey Litten the most eligible place of residence in the city," continued the beau; "it has but one drawback, and that is that it is in the opposite direction to Westgate Street; you lose that aroma which pervades the precincts of royalty, my dear madam; but even that is of no vital importance, for such is the affability of Her Royal Highness, that she honours all our assemblies, and is to be seen in the Cross Bath at nine every morning. You have not yet taken your amiable and lovely daughter to the bath, I imagine, madam?"

"No, sir," said Lady Chesney; "I propose to do so to-morrow."

"Lady Chesney will do all that is desirable. In Lady Chesney and Miss Chesney I see the most attractive adornments of our city without question. I can answer for the satisfaction with which the princess will welcome her ladyship and her daughter."

Lady Chesney was no match for His Majesty in compliments, she had been educated in a stiffer school, and a speech from her was ponderous and elaborate like a state coach, so that before it had fairly revolved in her mind, Nash had thrown off half a dozen, which crossed it on the road like so many light curricles.

"His time, it was scarcely his own—innumerable demands, her ladyship would understand—her quick grasp of mind embraced the whole at a glance—public man. One word. There had been annoyances with hired sedans—men not sober—of course her ladyship would hire her own bearers—there happened to be fewer pink liveries in Bath than any others—but doubtless her ladyship would prefer her family livery—had unaccountably forgotten the colour of the Chesney armorial bearings," and so saying, Mr. Nash was wafted from the room in a cloud of lavender scent, hair powder, and aromatic snuff, with a profusion of bows, which Lady Chesney answered by as many slow and stately curtsys as she could get through before the door closed upon her visitor.

"Ahem!" said Lady Chesney, "I have been a long time out of the world."

Mr. Bellingham joined them at the five o'clock tea-table, and they ate Sally Lunn from the basket of the original of that name. The brother and sister were cheerful and talkative in spite of buckram and the old school, and Dolly was encouraged to speak when she was spoken to, and permitted to ask one or two questions, which Mr. Bellingham in his character of a fashionable beau was delighted to answer.

"And now, my dear niece," he said, with one of his imposing bows, "now I shall have the pleasure of introducing you to the gay scene of St. Mary's rampier."

It was verging towards sunset when the party reached the promenade where the band was playing, and looked round upon their fellow pleasure-seekers. The world of Bath, sifted from the world of London, was dazzling itself, tapping its gold snuff-box, uttering its witticisms, and spreading its peacock-tail in the splendid sunshine, which poured alike over

those foolish heads, over the glittering river beyond the walls, the green slopes, the grey gabled houses, and the deep foliage of Beechen Cliff, standing boldly out behind the Abbey. It was occasionally noticed by some fair one, with a pettish exclamation, when she was forced to half-close the fine orbs which she had just been assured far outshone the lights of the firmament. Dazzled more by the faces than the sun, Dolly walked shrinkingly along by her mamma's side. In all her seventeen years she had never seen half so many fine people, nor had she ever been so stared at before. Lady Chesney's dignity was proof against the inquisitive battery of eyes. She was tall, black-eyed, thin-lipped, with an aquiline nose, and had, no doubt, been a beauty, and a toast, in her day. The style of her dress was a generation behind the present, but that was no uncommon sight. Dolly's sweet oval face came like a breath of pure country air across the gaudy, glittering throng: as the scent of jasmine brings back old summer days, this girl brought back a glimpse of a lost spring-time to some who followed her with surprised wistfulness. She felt terribly strange among them all, looking at them as she would at so many bits of china or strange toys.

Conspicuous among the rest, a party came pranking along headed by My Lady Di Buckler. Lady Di is not a widow; but few people know that the gouty old man, with the cross-grained face, and feet in flannel, drawn about in a chair, is her husband. Her heels were the highest, her hooped petticoat the shortest present; her party was composed of the gaudiest bodies and emptiest heads in Bath. They talked loudly, and laughed much; they had some wit among them, but not of the choicest description. They were the outcome of an artificial civilization, wherein vulgar ignorance and irreligion were rampant. They included a young man of very striking face and figure, with a frank and almost excusable air of self-satisfaction, which is so much more easily pardoned than gloomy self-conceit. Even Lady Chesney, glancing at him, hoped that her future son-in-law might resemble this very fine fellow. He carried his powdered head high, and was dressed with a sort of careless extravagance, wearing his splendid diamond buckles, and superb old lace, and carrying his snuff-box (a present from the Czar) with an unconscious grace that was very winning in feminine eyes. His fortunes were fluctuating, as a gambler's are apt to be, but his popularity was unwavering. London knew him in its choicest circles; Bath adored his impudence: he dashed through its

streets in the newest of curricles, and rode as straight to hounds as any man in Somersetshire. Ladies called him Apollo, and even those hard-hearted enough not to care two straws for him were not displeased to be seen dancing a minuet with him.

"What new folks are these, Piers Ludlow?" cried Lady Di, as the Chesney party advanced. "'Tis a sweet pretty child, and you know it, so don't pretend you did not see her."

"What, that little thing dressed like her own grandmother, my lady!" said Ludlow, who was fond of affecting to know at a glance what a woman had on.

"Who are they? If you can't enlighten me, I must ask them. Lud! I vow the old fellow is Bellingham, of Spincourt."

"Then I can enlighten your ladyship. Those two pieces of antiquity are Dame Chesney and her daughter."

"Come, how do you know?" asked Lady Di, whose peculiar province it was to know all about the young men she collected round her, and who was deep in the confidence of Sir Piers.

"Friends of my mother's," answered the young man, "I have heard of them all my life. I believe the respective mothers plotted a match between your poor Piers and this damsel while she was yet sucking her thumb in her cradle."

"Why, the girl's not a day more than fifteen, and you are near thirty, sir!"

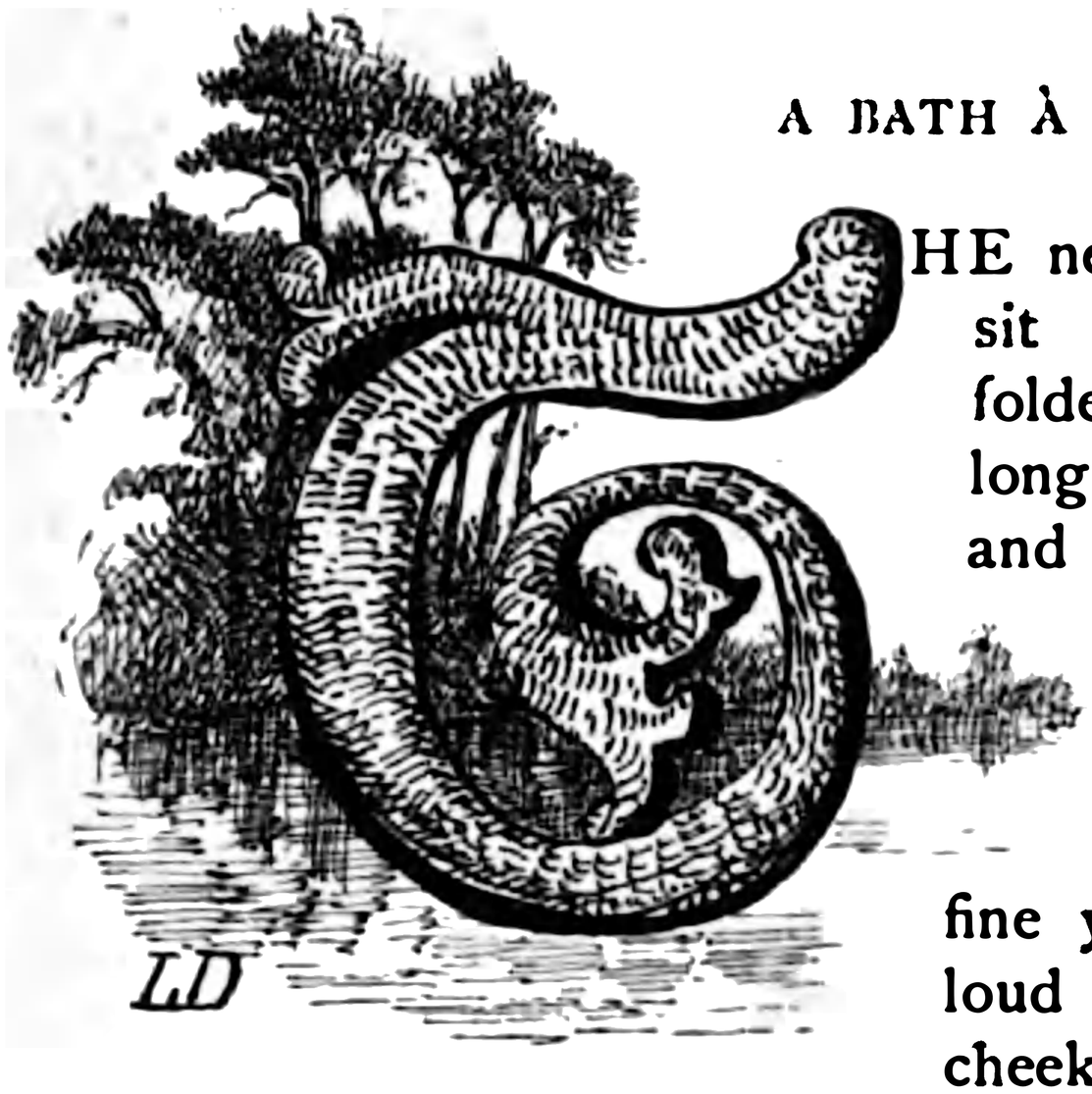
"Twenty-eight, my lady, twenty-eight, and from what one sees the young lady is sucking her thumb still—I must look to myself; innocence is so rare that it may be dangerous for me."

"Find out how much money there is, my dear, before all things."

"Certainly, 'tis no use flinging a paltry thousand or two into the gulf."

CHAPTER III.

A BATH À LA MODE.



THE next afternoon Dolly was ordered to sit by her mamma, with her hands folded, to receive visitors, and before long the room was filled with hoops and furbelows. Enter Lady Di Buckler attended by her usual little crowd; no one had ever seen Lady Di alone. She patted Dolly on the cheek, and said she was a vastly fine young lady; Dolly shrank from her loud voice, and coarse-skinned rouged cheeks, and wondered at her mamma's gracious reception of her. Lady Di had never been anything but plain, but she had an expression of shrewdness and good-nature which, in a measure, atoned for her plainness. Next in consequence came Lady Blunt, a young widow in becoming weeds, with no particular expression in her round, blue eyes, and round, fair face; she was a remarkable example of the perfection to which affectation may be carried, and was certain of but one thing, that she was the loveliest of her sex; the rest of her opinions were borrowed from the last person she talked with. She was attended by a small negro boy in a turban, carrying a snuff-box, a nosegay, a bottle of perfume, a fan, and a tiny King Charles' spaniel. Following her, advanced a pale, dark-eyed girl, whom Lady Di called Cammy Thresher, and a young man, struggling with an inclination to stoutness, and a red face, which caused him a world of woe. His name was Simmonds, and he was the professed adorer of Lady Blunt. It fell to Dolly's lot to talk to the widow, who, without a particle of tact, addressed her as she would have done Cammy Thresher, who had been buffeting with the world since she was ten years old. Dolly was completely bewildered, blushed, stammered,

whispered a "yes" or a "no," until Lady Blunt, lifting her pencilled (with lamp-black) eyebrows, turned her shoulder on the "country chit," and beckoned Mr. Simmonds to her side.

"Can't talk to little Miss Simplicity," she said with placid indifference. Mr. Simmonds giggled and looked delighted, and gave up contemplating his reflection, and trying to see the back of his coat in an oval mirror of a greenish hue. Camilla Thresher slipped into a chair next to Dolly, and commenced a conversation in a low tone; she knew better what to say, and Dolly felt interested in her. Meanwhile Lady Di rattled on to Lady Chesney, whose politeness and faith in "blood," combined to make her listen with attention, and to excuse a certain loudness to which she was unaccustomed as the fashion of the times.

"To-morrow you will take your girl to the baths, of course; for my part, though I dearly love the dish of chocolate and scandal that one gets, the steam makes me feel so monstrous queer that I dare not go often. I suppose the waters do one a power of good somehow, but upon my life I feel very like apoplexy after them, and I do think they boil the wits out of some of 'em, him for instance," and she indicated Mr. Simmonds with a jerk of her fan.

"I've a *rout* to-morrow afternoon," she continued, "and shall take it kind of you to bring your pretty little bird there; how she will enjoy the fun. We shall have the other girls mad with jealousy, for upon my soul she is a vastly fine girl, and the men will be round her like wasps with a honey-pot, they love anything new. Piers Ludlow is absolutely dying to be presented, for he spied her out on the rampier."

Lady Chesney drew herself up stiffly.

"I am amazed that Sir Piers Ludlow should not have made himself known to his late lamented mother's oldest friend," she said.

"Lud! now I have done the dear fellow a mischief!" cried Lady Di. "I protest he did not know from Eve who you were. 'Piers,' cried I, 'who are you after?' For there was he tearing about like mad to find out your names. Love at first sight, I declare; but I won't tell Miss Dolly. What a pack of fools the men are, but I can't exist without 'em. Now, Sally, we must be flying, and leave Lady Chesney to a fresh swarm of foes in the shape of new acquaintances. If I don't see you to-morrow, my lady, I shall send a body-guard for you. Adieu, pretty Mistress Dolly, we shall meet again soon."

And now the Chesneys may be considered fairly launched into Bath society.

That evening Dolly had to stifle many a yawn, at a card party at the house of some old family friends, where she sat silent, playing with a puzzle, while Lady Chesney was being a little put out by losing a few shillings. So it was possible to be dull, even in Bath.

The first thing in the morning came two sedan-chairs to the door, and Lady Chesney and her daughter descended the stairs in a totally novel costume; in bathing dresses, in short, frilled, and trimmed about the upper part, but warranted to endure a hot bath. Lady Chesney's hair was fashionably dressed as usual, and, as usual, Dolly had hers turned up and tied with a blue ribbon; in their hands they carried large nosegays and handkerchiefs of thread lace. Mr. Bellingham was afraid that his niece did, indeed, look fresh from the country, and it worried him; however, he had some hopes that even simplicity might answer as a novelty. He escorted them to their chairs, and watched them swinging down the gravel walk, and then went off to his reading-room to have a gossip. Bump, bump, went the chairs, the men had not learnt to keep step yet, and Dolly's whole attention was absorbed in out-manœuvring the sudden jolts which took place when they came into collision with another chair, or turned a corner unexpectedly. When she tried to look out of the window she knocked her nose, so she sat as still as she could, and held on.

"'Tis worse than the journey from Spincourt, madam," she exclaimed, when they alighted at the Cross Bath.

"Hold up your head, and carry your nosegay as I do," said Lady Chesney, as they followed an attendant into a dressing-room. A door on the opposite side of them being thrown open, steps were disclosed leading into a large square bath of green water open to the air, in which, amid a cloud of warm steam, floated a motley collection of the rank and fashion of Bath, in all the glory of wigs and powder. By each lady floated a little dish containing her nosegay, snuff-box, and handkerchief, and many of the company were further provided with cups of chocolate, which added their fragrant cloudlet to the general mist. Some faces were pale and sickly-looking in spite of rouge, and others seemed to gain freshness and colour from this boiling process, which was the preliminary to the day's amusements. Chat and gossip were in full swing, and friends were making their appointments and arrangements for the next twelve hours.

Dolly stood on the brink in alarm, but when her mother descended into the water with as much of her usual dignified decorum as she could possibly manage, she felt that she must pluck up courage and follow her. She dipped one sandalled foot into the warm water, and soon found herself swaying about, helpless, and almost breathless — one moment drifting against a passer-by, the next almost overturning an errant cup of chocolate. She got as far from the others as she could, and held on to the bar that ran round the bath. In a few minutes a door burst open, and a riotous party, headed by Lady Di Buckler, swarmed down the steps. Lady Di was attired in scarlet, as though to represent a boiled lobster; Lady Blunt followed arrayed still in deep black, relieved with lace about the arms and neck; she always dressed for the shallow end of the bath. Sir Piers Ludlow was of the party; and Mr. Simmonds, his complexion heightened by a garb of apple green, carried the widow's inseparable properties. Lady Di waved her hand to Dolly, calling out, "I congratulate you on your first appearance, Mistress Dolly; capital fun, isn't it? I'm coming over as fast as I can to you."

She was soon by her side.

"You look uncommon pretty, my love," she said, "clinging to the wall like a bit of seaweed; take my hand and walk about a bit. Now, I'll be bound you are dying to know who all these folks are. But you must understand that we don't introduce in the bath. There's Piers Ludlow—we call him Apollo, some heathen or other, wasn't he?—stirring up the widow's chocolate; that black-eyed girl is my *protégée*, Cammy Thresher; you have seen her; you two must be friends. How well the princess looks; 'tis pretty of her to join us porpoises, as that horrid Zinzan calls us. My love, you must not splash so, you have wetted my very top-knot."

"I feel very foolish, tumbling about among so many people," said Dolly, rescuing her drowning posy. "I should not mind it so much if these gentlemen were not here, and I could splash about like my big dog at home. Pray is this green water the same they drink at the pump-house?"

"Well, they vow not, but upon my life I can't think where it all goes to; but the doctors say it's very strengthening."

"I shall certainly not taste it!" cried Dolly.

"You will do a great many things before you leave Bath that you don't

dream of now, my dear. You'll soon be like the rest of the world; 'twould have been a sin to have kept so pretty a creature as you boxed up in the country; I vow I've took a prodigious fancy to you."

Dolly began to think that Lady Di was a kind soul, and that she was fortunate in being noticed by her. After a time she was left with her mother, who permitted her to sit upon the steps, half under water, in mermaid fashion, to listen to the band which was playing on the terrace above, encouraged by many a sixpence flung languidly from the bath.

"Well, my love, were you entertained by your morning's diversion?" Lady Chesney asked, as they went into their chairs, and Dolly was compelled to answer that it had not given her any great amount of pleasure.

"We shall not repeat it often," said her ladyship, and Dolly was glad to hear it.

A very important consultation took place between Lady Chesney and Abigail Bonthram, her waiting-woman, concerning Mistress Dolly's costume for that afternoon. The anxious mother's face wrinkled sadly as she turned over the store of dimity and muslin frocks, trying to find something suited to a Bath drum. How, indeed, were new fashions to penetrate the wilds of Hampshire? A London friend might occasionally write, "sleeves hanging again, and waists shorter, my love," or some such precious piece of instruction, but generally there were no newer patterns to follow than grandmother's court *sacque*, or mother's bridal gown.

"Well, Bonthram, Dolly don't look over sixteen to be sure, but many mothers marry their girls before that," Lady Chesney observed. "She must appear as a simple child for this once, her ball dress will be here for this evening."

CHAPTER IV.

PRINCE CHARMING.

THIS was Dolly Chesney as she appeared dressed for Lady Di's kettledrum, at the commencement of her Bath season. A tall, slight, supple figure, not yet having undergone the discipline of being tied to the bedpost and laced until she begged for a moment to breathe in. Smooth blue-veined temples, hazel eyes like pools on a heath reflecting blue sky and bracken fronds; a changing delicate complexion, nut-brown hair drawn up over a cushion; a childish mouth, and a gentle, timid expression; her dress all soft Indian muslin and cobweb lace, with tiny diamond buckles glinting from black ribbon about her throat and wrists. Sweet, meek Dolly, standing primly with folded hands to be criticized by her mother.

Lady Chesney wondered what the world would think of her; and took her fledgeling among the sharp-beaked sparrow-hawks, fearing nothing but an unfavourable verdict from them upon her appearance. Lady Di Buckler's house was the largest in Kingsmead Square; the rooms were small and low, but the staircase a fine, wide, oaken one. She had a great weakness for sales, and bought an extraordinary quantity of odds and ends of decorative furniture and *bric-à-brac;* China and India were largely

represented in the hall; there was a whole crockery shop on the first landing, and offshoots in the drawing-room and "parlour." There were inlaid cabinets, whose only design seemed to be that none of the patterns should match, and others decorated with plump salmon with intelligent blue eyes; and pig-tailed Romeos running off with simpering Juliets in wheelbarrows, while Chinese papas tore their hair in Chinese perspective. There were blue and white vases covered with writhing dragons with the five imperial claws. Ivory and ebony, cedar and sandal-wood, idols and elephants, beads and bowls, enough to make a collector pale with envy; but neither a book nor a picture anywhere. Take the whole house through and there would be found, as forming the whole collective literature, a recipe book in manuscript, some of Congreve's plays and Pope's poems, and a very dusty Bible. Lady Di could but spell out a page indifferent well.

The drawing-room was full of people; spidery-legged tables supporting a cup of chocolate, or a dish of tea, were standing in a thicket of brocade and hoops; an impish monkey chattered in one corner, parrots and cockatoos added their discord to the din of voices, and fat spaniels and poodles snarled among the feet of the company. Lady Di's taste was simply that of fashion; had the kitchen instead of the pantry been the mode, her panels would have shone with saucepans and dish-covers.

A brief roll on a drum and the Chesney party were announced. Lady Di came to meet them with both hands extended, welcoming them in a loud voice. She shuffled Mr. Bellingham off to a card-table, found an old acquaintance for Lady Chesney, and carried off Dolly, declaring that she was under her special protection. She planted her under a marble Cupid holding a cluster of wax candles, with a green porcelain griffin on one side, and a bowl of goldfish on the other; then, diving into the surging mass of powdered heads, silver gauze, gold lace, and fluttering fans, she extracted Sir Piers Ludlow from a window, where he and Cammy Thresher were trying to get a breath of air, and having presented him to Lady Chesney, led him in triumph to Dolly, and left them, with a stage injunction to make himself agreeable and not to lose his heart, feeling that she had done a very good-natured thing.

"Will you walk into my parlour? said the spider to the fly." Doubtless the poor little fly looked about it in just the same bewildered pleased fluster in which Dolly was at this moment, before it took the first fatal

step upon the winding stair. She raised her eyes to inspect the strange gentleman, the finest of his species she had ever seen, but they met his and fell instantly. Before being let loose in society where he was likely to meet Dolly, he ought to have been labelled "dangerous"; as it was, she had just as much chance as that unsuspecting fly.

That pleasant voice, that courteous manner, that winning face! Dolly was not the first who had believed in them with implicit faith. Piers Ludlow was born to brush the bloom from the sweetest fruit on the tree, to scatter the fair, fresh blossom so full of promise. There must have been something amiss in Dolly's watchful training that left her to the mercy of the first brilliant deception which crossed her path. While Lady Chesney thought so much of outward appearance as she did, it was in vain that she instructed little Mistress Dolly about certain pomps and vanities of this wicked world. The words came very glibly, and were very soon forgotten. Some rainy day, perhaps, the child's lesson might steal back to the woman, and then she might think that it could have been learnt in a less bitter way.

"Do you know, Mistress Chesney, you and I ought to consider ourselves old friends?" said Ludlow, with a smile, of which he knew the exact value.

"Indeed?"

"Yes; our mothers were school-fellows, and I am sure you will agree with me that the family friendship ought to be continued."

"Certainly, all my mamma's friends are mine," said Dolly, with sweet primness.

"This is your first visit to Bath, I hear, but doubtless you have visited London, and think little of the amusements here."

"Indeed I have never left home before."

"What, never peeped beyond the walls of Spincourt into the bad world outside? You are like a canary-bird escaped from its cage, we must feed you with sugar, or you will fly off again very soon."

"If you mean I shall leave Bath, indeed you are mistaken, because, even if I could, I should not wish to."

"What pleases you, fair Phillida? You appear very much in earnest."

"I think everything pleases me, but my name is Dolly, sir."

"Let it be Phillida to me—I have a fancy for the name, and all about you ought to be different from other people."

"Oh, why?"

"Because—I can't tell you. Don't you feel that you are a being from another sphere?"

"I feel that I am very much afraid of all these ladies and gentlemen."

"You need not be, unless it is envy and jealousy you fear. Come, tell me what you think of them—are you charmed by the grace and brilliancy of Lady Di Buckler, for instance?"

"She is very kind to me."

"So she is to me, so that point is settled; I dare say the wit and elegance of Lady Blunt, the city knight's widow, has dazzled you already; the fine breeding of Mr. Simmonds, and the solid sense of Nash; ah, I assure you we are a remarkable set of individuals. Give me your opinion of us before you become one of us."

"That will never be!"

"You flatter yourself that an angel was never caught in a butterfly net, but you will see."

"You have named almost all the people I know except Mistress Thresher; what ought I to think of her? I found her company very agreeable."

"Nay; Mistress Thresher and I are such old enemies that I will not speak of her, 'twould not be fair; and, moreover, she can speak for herself very readily."

"She has a somewhat sad face, I think."

"Oh no, we are all perfectly happy here, 'tis one long dream of happiness; Miss Thresher has many to love her; what more can she want?"

"Very little, truly."

"You think so? Does love make you happy?"

Dolly looked at him before she answered, and then was sorry she had done so, and coloured.

"Ah, I see how it is, these Hampshire squires have been beforehand with us; 'tis positively unfair."

"Oh, pray don't think—indeed, I don't care in the very least for one of them," cried Dolly, eagerly; "they are so uncourteous, so rough, so different. I do not think you would care to speak to them."

"At this moment certainly not. I have only room in my thoughts for one, and that is one so adorable that I am convinced she deems poor Piers Ludlow too infinitely below her to give him a single thought." He sank his voice, and assumed an air of melancholy. "Do you know, they

consider that same Ludlow a bad, wild, worthless fellow here. You will hear terrible stories about him, yet I am fain to think that he could be led by a soft pair of hazel eyes."

Dolly changed colour like a little cloud at sunset, and fluttered her fan, and looked down. It was all wonderful and new to her. Ludlow watched her with an amused smile; he admired her, and liked the innocent flattery of her looks and tones. He had had too much of flattery of another kind, and he was for the time tired of being met with his own weapons. Poor, spoilt child of the world, the simple knightly honour of his fathers was an unknown thing to him; his hard task was to amuse himself at any cost to others or his own soul, and even then he often failed.

"Do you know, I could tell you what you do every day at Spincourt as well as if I had been there," said Ludlow presently.

"Indeed, I cannot believe that possible," answered Dolly.

Then he sketched her life in a way which made her laughingly acknowledge its truthfulness.

"Yes; you know all about it: it was very happy. I wonder if I shall be sorry to go back?"

."You will not go back."

"Not go home again?"

"Never, as Dolly Chesney."

"Do you suppose I shall be married?"

"I do not doubt it."

"Nay; that is not kind of you; I hope I shall not, it would be so dull."

"So it would if you married a country clod, but in society, I can assure you, it makes no difference, or, rather, it relieves you from the stern authority of parents; so if you follow my counsel you will not reject any marriage your esteemed mother may arrange for you."

"Reject! no, that would be impossible; but I think I should not be happy if I had a husband who was unkind to me."

"Tush! what would it matter? but you don't comprehend these affairs yet, so we will let them alone. You will be content with one faithful swain at your beck and call, will you not, fairest Phillida? And, for the present, shall I summon that little black-faced boy, like an animated tulip in his turban, to procure some chocolate? Does Hebe deign to eat and drink with mortals?"

Obedient to his summons, two little serving-boys brought chocolate

and "delicate cakes" in a silver dish, and placed them on a folding table, like a very young lamb on legs too long for its body. Dolly pretended to sip the chocolate, but she was far too excited to need refreshment. Sir Piers rattled on, talking an immense deal of nonsense, seasoned with compliments, for this was long previous to the glad days when they became out of date, and Dolly listened with eyes, ears, and heart. That most transient happiness brought the colour to her cheeks, and lit up her face with new beauty.

"Sir Piers, Sir Piers!" A clear voice like raspberry vinegar, sweet and sour at the same time, broke the spell.

"Sir Piers, my lace is tearing, pray assist me."

It was Cammy Thresher, with her dark imploring eyes, and sharp profile, standing close at his shoulder. She held in one delicate hand the bit of lace that had been treacherously caught by one of a large family of wooden Cupids, who were playing bo-peep over a cabinet.

"These winged ruffians are everywhere," said Sir Piers, disengaging the lappet. "I wonder they are not afraid of meeting with the same treatment Campaspe gave one of the fellows."

Cammy glanced slightly at Dolly, and then significantly at him. "A new toy for a spoilt child," she said.

"If you will have it so, who has spoilt me?"

"Fools; men who are jealous of you, and women who care nothing for you."

"Don't they, Mistress Thresher, don't they care at all for me?"

"Oh, your man's vanity flatters you that they do—madly! The Duchess, and Miss Scrope, and Lady Blunt, and who knows, the princess herself, perhaps. They have not known you so long as I have."

"So you perceive that I must make new friends when my old ones forsake me."

"Oh, Piers,"—Cammy's voice was not so steady as it had been,—"you believe in no love but self-love."

"You and I know that that is the only love to be relied upon, Cammy; all the rest is but a puff of smoke blown up from the fire of self-love, and carried this way or that as the wind lists. But 'tis as pretty a fancy as any other, and the poets get their bread by it."

Camilla bit her lip sharply, and turning away, passed her arm through Lady Di's, and turned pale under her rouge. Poor Cammy! in the

bitterness and emptiness of her life she had not attained to the sublime indifference of a worn-out heart, which many of her compeers reached full early in their course.

Dolly's sweet dream was broken by Lady Di, who bustled up with a gentleman on either side, and a face red with heat and excitement.

"Now, Ludlow, be off," she exclaimed. "Miss Dolly, my love, your mother has just discovered that you have no better chaperon than this tall good-for-nothing. I vowed I had seen you safe a minute ago with Lady Chandos, but now, willy nilly, you must pop back under her ladyship's wing, or she will never trust you to me again, and then good-bye to your fun."

But Sir Piers was not to be dismissed so abruptly; he followed Dolly to her mother's side, and won Lady Chesney's heart in five minutes. He asked permission to be Dolly's partner at the ball that evening; Lady Chesney would have been too happy, but she feared to encroach upon the privilege of Mr. Nash. Ludlow assured her, however, that Nash and he understood one another, that he never brooked interference, and especially in such a matter as the one in question; so Dolly's happy fate for the evening was settled.

The interest of the kettledrum was now over for her, but some duties remained. She was presented to all Lady Chesney's old friends, and heard various opinions, all of course complimentary, passed upon her. Lady Chesney, however, was not entirely satisfied with the impression she had made. She believed that Sir Piers' asking Dolly's hand was a mere tribute to the family friendship; but being greatly pleased with his appearance and manners, she trusted something might come of it. Simplicity was evidently out of fashion, and Dolly should make a more effective appearance next time.

They dismissed their chairs, and walked home, for the unwonted heat and crowd made them desirous of a little fresh air. Sir Piers escorted them; and Dolly walked by her mother very happily in demure silence, looking up admiringly every now and then, through her long brown eyelashes, at this courteous, graceful knight, whom men called "handsome Ludlow." His bow and smile were perfection when they parted in the Abbey Litten.

Dolly ran to pull aside the curtain, and peep after him from the window, as he strolled away in the direction of Christopher's Coffee-house.

CHAPTER V.

DOLLY DANCES HER FIRST MINUET.

MISTRESS CHESNEY was speedily summoned to admire her splendid dress laid out for the ball, over which Mrs. Abigail Bonthram had been standing in rapt awe and delight for the last half-hour. She pictured to herself the incomparable Mistress Dolly parading the ballroom, dukes and marquises carrying her fan and posy, and the Princess Amelia asking to be allowed to copy the trimming on her gown.

"There'll be a deal o' fighting, I shouldn't wonder, my pretty, when they sees you. I do hope as Mr. Nash, which I hear tell is King o' Bath, won't allow the gentlemen to hurt themselves serious. But small wonder if they do out with their swordses, and your hair one mask o' powder, and your mamma's pearls and all. But, my dearie, don't you have nothing to say to any gentleman under a duke, which they tell me is next to the princes themselves. Hold yourself high and stand-offish, spread out your train, and say 'No, thank you, sir,' to them all at first."

"My mamma will have to say that for me, thank heavens," said Dolly; "I am just going to enjoy myself as much as ever I can before the

dreadful day when my uncle and my mother arrange a marriage for me Oh, dear, that will be worse than dancing a minuet with Mr. Nash! But I'm going to have a partner to-night much grander than any duke or prince, I can tell you, Abby; the most splendid gentleman. I can't think how he came to ask me, and me only in my white muslin frock!"

"Well, there, you will be fine enough to-night, my honey."

"I don't know, Abby; my gown looks mighty fine there by itself; but if there are a hundred others, grander than they were at Lady Di's kettledrum, there will be a blaze of satin and diamonds like a fairy queen's ball, and I shall not be seen."

"Bless us; see how the chick begins to hold up its head and crow as if she knowed all about it! I warrant when you've been to a few more kettledrums—and what ever they can be passes me—you won't have a word for poor old Abby; no asking her to tell you a story, you'll be so perked up as never was."

"You're telling a story now, you old Abby," said Dolly, kissing her; and when the moment for dressing arrived Mrs. Abigail was completely pacified.

Dolly had pictured the ballroom to herself a hundred times, as a sort of Aladdin's palace, but she was not prepared for the effect of the first night of it upon her. She had to grow more familiar with those rooms, and to find that many a heartache might be endured in them, before she learnt that they were not so splendid as she fancied. Glittering lights, mirrors, sweet scents, gold and precious stones, and strange faces swam around her like a dream; she pinched her arms to make sure that she was awake, and only by degrees recovered sufficiently to look about her. Quaint and prim was that ballroom of old days, with the drilled decorum of the dancers, the precise rows of dowagers, the sedate files of powdered, shaven-faced beaux, with their cocked hats tucked under their arms, and their jewelled snuff-boxes held daintily between finger and thumb. How shocked they would have been could a vision of a modern ball come before their complacent eyes! A mad, scandalous scramble would they have deemed it, with maidens whirled round by one stranger after another in the barbaric waltz. Torn lace and gauze bestrewing the floor—a struggling crowd of breathless women, and heated, bearded men in funereal black, and day dawning unregarded in the midst of it.

Dolly sat below her mother, towards the top of the room, and before long she saw the plump smiling princess, in her immense hoops and

draperies of blue and silver shimmering with massive cords and tassels of silver, being escorted to her place in the centre of the bench reserved for ladies of quality. But as yet Dolly had not seen all she hoped to see. Suddenly her face beamed with delight, as a graceful, rose-scented figure, all white velvet and glittering diamond buckles, passed up the room, and smiled and bowed to her. He did not, however, pause until he reached the group of which the princess was the centre. Dolly sighed, though she assured herself that it was just as she expected, but she felt as she had not felt before—that she was only little, insignificant Dolly Chesney. But she could still say proudly to herself that he was to be her partner. She could not take her eyes or her attention from the royal circle, and presently observed a general excitement in it. "A wager, a wager," the princess cried, "she don't pass," pointing as she spoke, with her fan, to the other end of the room. "Nash is not the man to have his laws broken. What an air, as though her Grace were empress at least! He refused me an extra dance after eleven last Tuesday se'nnight, so 'tis a most impudent woman to think he will give way to her. If she dances in an apron you may order my carriage." Following the direction of all eyes, Dolly saw Mr. Nash bowing profoundly before a stately and exceedingly beautiful woman, whose head with its plumes and aigrettes of diamonds towered above the greater number of the gentlemen standing round her. She was laughing and protesting, but at length appeared to yield; unfastening a rich lace apron, she presented it with a gracious and condescending air to Mr. Nash, who seemed overwhelmed by his victory. The princess clapped her hands, and exclaimed, "I would never have pardoned the man if he had given way!" The party then advanced, and the vanquished beauty took her seat near the princess, amid a volley of polished witticisms from the circle, in which she did not fail to detect a fair amount of spite and venom. Sir Piers glided round and stood at her back, talking in low tones, while she turned her lovely face so as to catch his words. And now the band struck up, startling and thrilling Dolly, for it was the first she had ever heard. Mr. Nash led out the princess to open the ball, and the beautiful Duchess of Kingston followed, attended by Sir Piers Ludlow. The pairs arranged themselves down the room, and the first minuet, that most graceful of dances, commenced. The gentlemen who were not dancing ranged themselves behind the dowagers on the upper bench; the girls sat in a demure row in front, according to one of Nash's rules

that the elder ladies and children should sit at the back, as having passed or not come to perfection. Next to Dolly, however, notwithstanding this order, was a child of about twelve in as fantastic a garb as any of her elders, swinging her feet, making loud remarks to any one who liked to listen, and otherwise annoying her neighbours. "You are a pert little miss," observed one of them; but the young lady promptly replied, "You are an interfering old quiz." She snatched Dolly's posy out of her lap, and began to play at ball with it; then descending suddenly on Dolly's furbelows, she nudged her with her fan, and said peevishly, "I'm hungry. What an eternity they are over their stupid minuets!—I am sure it's tea-time." She next looked well at Dolly from head to foot, and fingered her ribbons, and pulled about the diamond clasps of her bracelets, in spite of Dolly's remonstrances, which were uttered in too gentle a manner for her to pay any attention to them.

"How is it I have never seen you at an assembly before, miss?" she inquired; "have you only just come to Bath?"

"Yes, I have been here but a few days," answered Dolly.

"Lud! I come every season, and go to all the balls. Do you love balls?"

"This is the first I have ever been to."

"Why, what a simpleton you must be! Tell me your name. I am Miss Biddy Trulow."

Dolly satisfied her curiosity, and found that this was only the prelude to a string of questions.

Miss Biddy finding she had a novice to deal with, bragged and romanced to her heart's content, lording it over her inexperienced neighbour.

"Now I'll tell you what I did," said she, confidentially. "I vowed I'd tread on the princess's train, and I did. Oh, didn't she frown! And I pinned Lady Blunt's lappet to ugly Lady's Scrope's damask. I know every creature in this room, and I creep up and listen when I want to hear what they are talking about; then if I choose I can make mischief. Oh, I assure you, Miss Dolly, you had better not make an enemy of me; but if I have a friendship for any one, I would do anything for them. I saw you curtsy to Miss Cammy Thresher; do you love her? Sometimes she is as sweet as sugar-candy, but sometimes I could bite her for a cross patch as she is."

"If you know every one in the room, perhaps you can inform me who that fine, elegant lady is who is dancing with Sir Piers Ludlow, little miss," said Dolly.

"Bless me, don't you know her Grace of Kingston?"

"And why did Mr. Nash take her apron from her?"

"Why, because it's a new rule that ladies should not dance in aprons, or gentlemen in swords. I'm mighty glad; 'tis plaguy enough to manage one's own train, but those clattering swords were always tripping me up. Have you got a partner yet, miss, for the *contre-danse?*"

"Yes, I am to dance with Sir Piers Ludlow."

"Heighty, tighty! the finest man in the room; I've a mind to stick a pin into you; but I'm not tall enough yet to dance with him. I stretch my neck and legs every morning and night though, and you will soon see me stepping out with him. There is only one other gentleman I would rather dance with. Guess who I mean."

"I am acquainted with so few, I should be sure to guess wrong."

"Well, what say you to Prince Charlie? I'd love to dance a 'Triumph' with him all down this room. When he has turned out the old Hanoverian rat, I mean to make my mother take me to St. James's."

Dolly was scandalized.

"Oh, fie! Miss Biddy, to speak so of his Majesty."

Miss Biddy laughed heartily.

"Oh, you are a pretty-behaved miss, who always does as she's bid, but I'm a hoyden. My mamma always calls me her darling romp; and I say what I please."

At this moment there was a quiet movement in the row; the minuet came to an end, and Mistress Camilla Thresher moved up to them.

"Biddy, my love," she said, "go to your mamma, and I'll bring you some comfits on to the rampiers to-morrow."

"I'm fairly tired of this insipid little madam," cried Miss Biddy, jumping up, "so you may talk to her if you please," and she bounded away to torment her adoring mother.

"Little horror!" said Miss Camilla, "there is no bearing her monkey tricks; I fear she has been teasing you, dear Miss Dolly."

"I did not expect to see children here, and I have counted ten or twelve," said Dolly.

"Yes, the little plagues scream to come, and their mothers bring them

Now, tell me, my dear Miss Dolly, if you are not vastly charmed with the ball; did you ever see so many fine gowns and heads? Do you admire the Duchess of Kingston's philomot coloured brocade?"

"I think she is extraordinary beautiful, madam, and her gown becomes her vastly."

"And what a modish air she has!—'tis that that Sir Piers admires so hugely."

"Oh, truly, I do not wonder."

But as she answered she felt a new sensation—a chill which seemed to damp the pleasure with which she had been anticipating her dance with Ludlow.

"Apollo's very naughty, you know, and every one is in love with him," Camilla ran on lightly. "You wouldn't believe the stories I could tell you of the silliness of women."

"Indeed, I think I would rather not hear them, madam."

"Nay, dear Miss Dolly, one would imagine that you were as severe as Nash himself, who has ruled that all whisperers of lies and scandals shall be taken for the authors of them. But a fig for Nash and his rules! People only want to be amused; and if nothing but truth were told, good breeding would be much offended."

This was beyond the comprehension of little Miss Chesney, and just then the band commenced the prelude to the second minuet. She watched Mr. Nash, who was conspicuous by his red ribbon and diamond badge, with a painful fascination. Lady Chesney bent down and said, "I expect you to do me credit, my love;" and the master of the ceremonies advanced and offered his hand to her. She would willingly have suffered a sprained ankle rather than go through the ordeal, and quaking with apprehension she was led to the top of the sets. She kept her eyes fixed upon the ground, as if she were being led out to instant execution, and tried not to think of that awful row of dowagers, with her mamma in the midst of them, between whom and herself lay a bare stretch of boards. She kept an anxious watch upon her partner, that she might not miss the exact moment for beginning. Mr. Nash, who had been keeping time to the music with an almost imperceptible motion of the head, now turned towards her with his hat under his arm, and made the first bow, shaking a little cloud of hair-powder at her feet. She was conscious that her answering curtsy was stiff and wavering. Every muscle seemed fixed into

rigidity under the spell of those long rows of gazing eyes. A flourish of the beaver, a graceful slide to the left, and a gaze of pensive admiration, formed her partner's next step. Mr. Nash considered minuet dancing in the light of high art, and asserted that it could be made to express every emotion in turn. An offer of marriage might be made, accepted, or rejected without a word, between skilled dancers; and every shade of sentiment imitated. Dolly, not in the least understanding the *finesse* of the performance, slid, and curtsied, and turned on her toes, with a rigid countenance, but, alas! dropped her fan suddenly on to the floor. This was a casualty for which Mr. Nash was fully prepared, having practised it in private, and without a pause he skilfully recovered it, delighted with the chance of displaying a little extra grace and readiness. "No trifle should be beneath the notice of a minuet dancer," was one of his precepts.

Dolly got through the remainder of her steps pretty well, but she was greatly rejoiced when an excited quavering in the music, as if all the instruments had been seized with uncontrollable agitation, announced the termination of that long fifteen minutes. A crash, and a series of chords, and she was at liberty to turn to her partner, and sink down in her final curtsy. Mr. Nash awarded the prize of his approval, and she was led back to her seat, much relieved that it was over.

"Very good for a beginner," said Miss Biddy Trulow, "though you did stumble over your train, drop your fan, and look as if Nash was your dancing-master, who would thump you if you did a wrong step. I was making faces at you all the time."

Dolly hardly heard the imp's remarks; she was beginning to doubt if balls were really the perfection of happiness. She was yet more doubtful when it fell to a stranger to take her in to tea, and she had to listen to the dull and laboured compliments of a bashful man, struggling for an air of ease and fashion. Her eyes wandered wistfully after Piers Ludlow and his partner; she yawned and wished herself in bed. If only he would look as if he remembered her existence; poor Dolly, this was the first of many "if onlys!" But all errors were recanted when not many minutes later she was dancing on ether with a splendid figure in white and silver; for Piers had not forgotten his engagement, and claimed her before the *contre-danse* began. With what sparkling eyes, and flutter of the heart, she took his hand! The heart of Piers Ludlow must have been an empty husk if it was not touched. Her homage pleased him, and bending his brown eyes

upon her he whispered all his stock of flatteries, and swore besides, that she was the loveliest little shepherdess out of Arcadia.

"What a terrible fellow that Ludlow is!" cried Lady Di; and Cammy. Thresher, shrugging her shoulders, murmured "Little fool;" and Lady Chesney, enchanted with the elegant behaviour of Sir Piers, speculated upon the probability of his "breaking his mind" to her very shortly.

Dolly's little nautilus bark was fairly launched upon fairy seas, with the old story of "youth at the helm, and (folly) at the prow"—on, on, without a voice to warn the little heart that trusts all the world. With lovely coral reefs straight ahead, for which who fears, and who cares, until the sudden strike, the crash as of crystal, and the cold rush of waters! Those were supreme moments when she swept through the ballroom with her Prince Charming by her side; she felt she could spare a little pity for every other feminine soul present.

Already there were eyes upon her; the quick-sightedness of lookers-on in such cases amounts to second-sight.

"How would it do as a match, I wonder?" said Lady Di.

"As well as the generality," answered Cammy, in her bitter-sweet tones. "He will not sicken of her admiration much before the honeymoon is out, but he is not doomed yet."

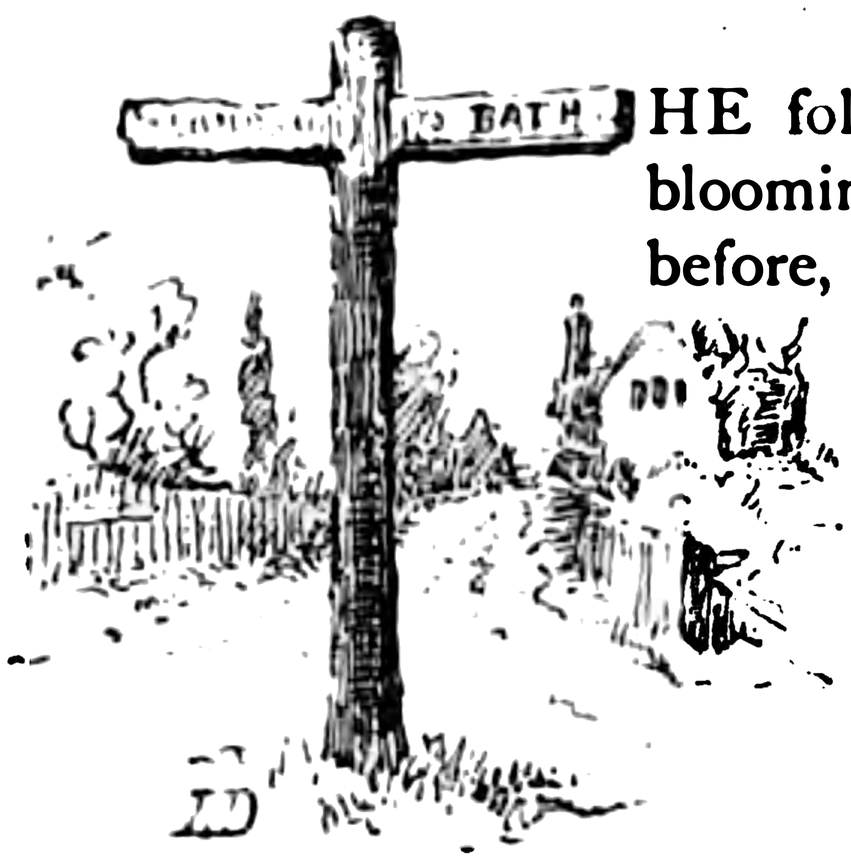
"I vow I almost believe you are fool enough to hanker after him still, Cammy Thresher; but 'tis purely past credit!" exclaimed Lady Di, laughing.

"Pish! you forget I am not quite so new to the world as your latest *protégée*, Miss Dolly," said Camilla, sharply.

Lady Di, ever watchful over her favourites, tapped Sir Piers on the shoulder, and took him away for half an hour's cross-examination and counsel, before the band played "God save the King," and the clock struck eleven. At that timely hour the ball was closed; knights and squires swaggered away to play cards, and quaff claret, until dawn peeped in on haggard and dishevelled groups, whom their late partners would scarce have recognized. Could Dolly, for instance, have had a glimpse of Ludlow, lounging over a card-table, with his lace cravat awry, and, in the place of pleasant smiles, a hard, reckless expression on his countenance, and have heard the rude, coarse speech for which he had exchanged all his soft tones and poetical phrases, she might never have taken another step towards her mirage; but she slept on in peace, without any such disturbing visions.

CHAPTER VI.

AMONG CHINA.



THE following morning saw little Miss Chesney as blooming as if she had been to no ball the night before, on her way to the pump-house with her mamma. Round every corner she expected to meet Sir Piers, who was sound asleep in his bed; and took the most unlikely people for him. Her head was full of the ball, and of her partner; and it is to be feared that Lady Chesney would have received very abstracted answers to her questions, if she had not chosen Sir Piers herself as the subject of such conversation as she chose to enter into with her daughter. This was brief, as she discouraged familiarity.

It was the fashionable hour at the pump-house, and the hot water was steaming and bubbling merrily, while the attendant ran briskly about handing glasses; and a boy, whose muscles appeared to have profited by contact with the tonic, plied the pump-handle incessantly. There were gouty old gentlemen parading the room, and elderly ladies, leaning upon the arms of companions, with rouged cheeks and jaunty air, defying the supposition of rheumatic tortures. There were two or three singular-looking beings, waifs from a bygone generation, who appeared nowhere else; and lawyers and M.P.'s who took their draughts with great perseverance, determined to go back to town really the better for their sojourn at "the Bath." When the great Marlborough had tottered daily to this very pump, and haggled over sixpences with the chairmen, a rude shed formed the only protection from the weather; but now Wood's new building reared its stately proportions, and the mineral streams flowed within Corinthian walls and painted ceilings.

Lady Di was sitting down, talking with her usual energy, flamingo ribbons starting all over her head; her feet stuck out beyond the edge of her satin petticoat, so that if any one should be disappointed with the summit of the edifice, they could not fail to be charmed with its shapely supports, or to admire the orange stockings with violet clocks, the purple silk slippers with gold buckles and heels.

Cammy Thresher was leaning over the back of her chair, rather pale, with the corners of her mouth turned down, as they had a trick of doing when things went amiss. The two were chatting confidentially, and whether they indulged in peals of laughter, or whispered with significant looks, they were equally sure to be celebrating the obsequies of some newly-murdered reputation. As soon as Lady Chesney sailed in with Dolly in her train, she was seized upon, and Camilla was sent for chairs, that they might have a comfortable chat together. At the same moment Dolly felt her sleeve plucked, and turned, to discover her friend Miss Biddy.

"Well, my love!" cried that engaging child, "you don't look much the worse for your frisking last night. Now, when I saw myself in the mirror this morning, I said, Biddy Trulow, you look a beast of a ghost, and if scciety serves you so, you had better give it up. Cammy says it's because I ate cakes all night, but I don't believe it. You won't see your fine partner here this morning, miss; I suppose you think you will. What a prince of a fellow he is! he's just the sort of man I mean to marry."

"Does your mamma permit you to talk in this way, Miss Biddy?" said Dolly.

"My mamma, forsooth! do you take me for a baby, do you suppose I wear coral and bells still, my dear?" returned Biddy contemptuously. Then looking about her for amusement, she suddenly asked Dolly if she had tasted the waters yet. Dolly declined making the experiment, but she was not let off so easily. Miss Biddy jumped up and seized the boy at the pump by the sleeve, demanding a glass. She carried it back to Dolly, spilling it right and left, and held it over her.

"Off with it, or no luck in Bath for you!" she cried.

"Take it away, pray, Miss Biddy," implored Dolly.

"I suppose you think pap the properest stuff for you; but I vow you shall drink this, madam."

"Why do they drink it in brown cups?"

"It's the water turns them, Miss Simple; don't you know it turns silver into gold? here, give me your thimble, and you shall see."

Dolly willingly produced it from her dimity pouch, and gave it as her ransom; and Biddy ran off and popped it into the water.

"Come, my pretty little vixen, I won't have Mistress Chesney teased any more," said Camilla, putting her hands on Miss Biddy's shoulders.

"I was only making a gold thimble for her, you cross patch; I should have had three of my own if I had not lost them," said Biddy, putting up her shoulders and frowning.

Mistress Thresher had been sent to bring Dolly after her mother and Lady Di, who were just going to the reading-room at the "Civet Cat," almost next door to the pump-house.

"Lady Di wants to hear about the last raffle," said Cammy, "but you and I will stay in the front shop, people always come in. Lady Blunt spends half her time there pulling about the toys and gimcracks; I suppose she makes up for it by buying a heap. 'Tis a chany shop you see, full of monstrous odd things. I should like to have the money Lady Blunt spends on toys and sweets! If she did not pinch and slap her companion so much, I would like hugely to change places with her, for she gets tired of her things directly, and her woman makes a pretty penny by them. 'Tis the only thing that makes life tolerable to us slaves."

"But what do grown people want with toys?" asked Dolly; "my mamma put my dolls away on my thirteenth birthday; to be sure, I cried."

"Lady Blunt's puppets are to show her the mode in dress, they send over these painted babies from Paris; but you have yet to learn what simpletons there are among us. Folly is as infectious as the plague, only you don't always know when you have taken it."

"If that is the case," cried Dolly, "I would rather give up this charming life, and return home."

"Oh, no, my dear soul, you find fools everywhere, but for pity's sake give 'em to us gilded, and dressed *à la mode*. No reasonable being should live in the country—the silence stifles one."

"Well, I do not wish to see it again for many months," said Dolly.

"Come and look at these curious monsters in the window," said

Camilla, taking her hand. "What! have you spied out something more interesting than china?"

Coming leisurely towards the "Civet Cat" was Sir Piers Ludlow, his coat of amaranth velvet showing out a bright spot of colour in the grey square through which he was passing.

"Pray stand back, Mistress Thresher, he will think we are watching him," said Dolly, shyly.

Camilla shot a scornful glance at her, and promptly cried out that, if she moved, a whole pile of Japan boxes threatened to tumble down. In consequence of this delay Ludlow caught sight of Dolly's slim figure, and turned at once into the shop.

"For once fortune has befriended me," he said, gaily, "and I find fair Phillida straying, not amid grots and bowers, but teapots and puppets. 'Tis a poor exchange, in sooth, for her, but a happy one for poor swains who are not at liberty to wander in the soft scenes of contentment and ease from whence our little shepherdess has been stolen."

"To stray more pleasingly in this Arcadia of ours, where there is 'truth in every shepherd's tongue,'" added Camilla.

"We shall need to make chains of rosebuds and woodbine in order to bind so complete a nymph, and even then I fear she would break through and flutter away," said Ludlow.

Dolly sat in dumb eloquence, happy, but tongue-tied. Camilla bewildered her, and she was too shy to speak to Ludlow when a third person was present. After a short and happy time Lady Chesney came rustling towards them, and Lady Di's loud voice was heard—

"Where are those gadabouts now? I am positive they've got into some mischief when our backs were turned! What, Ludlow, you here, you sly fellow!" and she patted him on the back, and shook her head playfully at Dolly.

"Pardon me, madam," said a clear, manly voice, and they perceived that a young man in clerical dress was standing in the blocked doorway.

"Bless me, Mr. Zinzan," said Lady Di, eyeing him with a cool stare, and at the same time permitting him to pass.

Lady Chesney came forward. "I hear a name that is justly familiar to me," she said. "Will you do me the honour of making me acquainted with the son of one of my oldest friends, your ladyship?"

"Stars!" murmured Cammy, "to think of addressing the curate!"

"Is this gentleman an acquaintance of yours, sir?" Dolly asked of Sir Piers.

"Mine! faith, no," answered Ludlow. "I thank my fortune I boast of no acquaintance with Geneva gowns. I see them ruffling with their betters in hopes of being mistaken for some of His Majesty's officers, but I think I know not one to whom I doff my beaver."

Lady Chesney summoned Dolly, and presented Mr. Zinzan to her. Ludlow's scornful speech had so prepossessed her mind with an idea of the inferiority of the clerical profession that she scarcely looked at Mr. Zinzan when she made her curtsy, and answered his few but kind and gentle remarks with the air of a shy child constrained to civility against its will.

"Mr. Zinzan is kind enough to propose showing us the interior of the Abbey, daughter," said Lady Chesney.

"Reverend sir," said the woman of the shop to the young clergyman, "I have a mind to strike a bargain about that chany you was speaking of t'other day. I sent along for a piece as you desired, and should be glad to take it all if we can be agreed."

"It was concerning that I came," he answered. "I will look in after noon to settle with you. Madam, I am at your service," he continued, turning to Lady Chesney.

"So he ekes out his pittance by trading," observed Ludlow contemptuously.

"'Tis highly amusing to have caught him," added Camilla. "Did you observe how hastily the pitiful fellow turned it off?"

"Well, let him soil his hands if he pleases," said Ludlow; "but 'tis his low revolutionary practices that ought to be stopped. We shall have the mob about our ears, instead of under our feet, if such ranters as he are let loose. This white-faced parson is a regular firebrand champion of the scum of the earth. The fellow must be crazed, for he is a man of family, I understand."

Dolly listened, and looked with fresh suspicion at Mr. Zinzan, who was now leading the way with the two elder ladies towards the Abbey. Greatly to her disappointment, Ludlow left them at the entrance, laughingly declaring that he had no ambition to invade the precincts of the dead before his time. The rest of the party entered the nave, and Mr. Zinzan pointed out such tombs and tablets as were likely to interest them. Lady Di did her best to improvise remarks suitable to the occasion, and

Camilla yawned repeatedly, and uttered cynical levities aside to Dolly, who thought it all so tiresome that she was ready to smile at them. Having satisfied her curiosity in seeing "How well Bath waters serve to lay the dust," and made numerous inquiries concerning Mr. Zinzan's mother and elder brother, Lady Chesney made her parting salutation to her new acquaintance, and took Dolly home. She ascertained that her old friend Madam Zinzan was not in Bath, and that the curate of the Abbey lived with his brother at their old family house, St. Ann's Court, in the suburbs, not a quarter of an hour's walk from the Abbey Litten. From Lady Di she had heard that the elder Zinzan was "an odd sort of fellow," and as he and Sir Piers Ludlow were the two possible aspirants to the hand of her daughter, whom she had in her mind upon her coming to Bath, she was more than ever confirmed in her opinion that the baronet was the one to be favoured in his pretensions. Everything seemed to point to a prosperous issue to the scheme; for wherever they went they fell in with him, and he joined them with an appearance of great devotion. "The rampiers at five, love, if we should be so unhappy as not to meet before," were Camilla's last words to Dolly Chesney when they parted; and on the rampiers, amid the fashionable crowd, and accompanied by the music of the brass band, Dolly walked with the affectionate Cammy, and her Prince Charming. He was visible again at an evening *rout*, and though his attentions were divided, he still paid sufficient to her to make her find the evening a very agreeable one. The bird was fluttering pleasantly on the limed twig, wishing for no greater happiness than so to flutter for ever.

One day followed another so quickly that Dolly lost count of them; her dates were her meetings with Ludlow, these more or less white chalk days were all she went by. Sometimes he was flattered into something like real tenderness, but this happened rarely. Yet for the time being, she really attracted him by the exquisite freshness and sweetness of her character, and not less by her genuine admiration for his adored self, which was not merely the result of vanity, as was so often the case.

They were strolling together at one of those sunset gatherings on St. Mary's ramparts, in what was a golden dream to Dolly. Ludlow exerted his powers of fascination, perhaps the more because two or three voices had pronounced her the prettiest girl in Bath that season, and dropped barbed darts of delicate flattery straight into her heart, which left a blush on her cheeks, and a quiver on her lips. He would have her cross the ferry, and

take a ramble in the meadows; she was delighted, sometimes she grew tired of her new *rôle* of fine lady. She sprang into the clumsy old boat, and sat where she could dabble her hand in the water; she caught at the water-lilies, and was eager to have some bulrushes which were growing at the edge of the river. Ludlow did not comprehend these fancies, and had no enthusiasm for getting wet in her service. He laughed, and languidly stretched out his hand for the rushes, but when he found they were beyond his reach, he took no more trouble about them.

"That is unkind of you," Dolly said.

"I vow 'tis worth being called unkind, to see you pout," returned Ludlow. Dolly was easily diverted from her wishes, and not inclined just yet to quarrel. The inevitable drop of bitterness had not yet fallen into her honey, so she answered with a smile and a wish that the bulrushes had been accessible.

"Now you only need your crook and lambs," said Ludlow, as they strolled over the grass; "you are a veritable shepherdess, one should be Sidney himself to talk to you."

When they returned to the ramparts Camilla joined them.

"Have you seen my mamma, Miss Camilla?" Dolly inquired.

Cammy laughed.

"Now, who do you suppose she is talking with? 'tis purely droll, I assure you."

"Then you must tell me, for I have no idea."

"Well, then, what say you to that monster among prigs, the elder Zinzan? What brought him hither I cannot guess. Dear Miss Dolly, you will certainly be presented to him."

"Is this Mr. Zinzan so disagreeable a man, Sir Piers?" Dolly asked.

"Vastly disagreeable, I believe," replied Ludlow, "but, as usual, you women have to answer for it. He was, so the story goes, attached to a lady in the suite of the Princess Amelia, and she, very properly, jilted him. Since then, I fancy, he quarrels with the whole world; he never joins in the diversions of gentlemen, and, still more strange, he shuns your sex altogether. Now, I am sure you will have no mercy on him."

"On the contrary, I am a little, just a little, sorry for him," said Dolly.

"Take care then that your pity does not increase, for 'tis akin, they say, to something of another sort."

"Contempt, to wit," put in Cammy.

"With us poor worldlings," said Ludlow; "but with Mistress Dolly it may be a different story; her angelic heart is too full of gentleness and tenderness to permit of scorn; or if any lurks there, it will be for some faithful swain, whom her disdain will slay—such are the windings of a woman's nature."

"Pish!" said Cammy, shrugging her shoulders, "at least Miss Dolly need not waste her compassion. But as for this Zinzan, 'tis no wonder he looks so sour if he listens to his brother's sermons, which are incredibly mad and melancholy. Lady Di won't go to hear them because some people have swooned at them—not that she ever goes to anything more like a church than Mr. Gilly Flowers' in Stall Street; but Mrs. Scrope was carried home in a sedan and floods of tears, and vowed she would give up cards; then Lady Blunt vows there is nothing in them, but, I believe, she was playing with her pouncet box, and whispering Simmonds all the time. It might give one bad dreams, so I shall stay away."

At this moment Lady Chesney summoned her daughter.

"Go, love, and bestow your smiles upon the friendless man," said Camilla.

Dolly went away obediently, leaving her heart behind her; was introduced to Mr. Zinzan, set him down at once as plain and dull, and was compelled to walk by her mamma's side in silence, listening to a store of reminiscences of the Zinzan family, in which she took no interest, while at a little distance she could see Piers and Cammy still together, and engaged in what appeared an engrossing conversation. She wondered they had not missed her more; she wondered what they were saying, if by chance they were talking of her. Of her! did that Prince Charming ever talk of her, or, better still, think of her? He might, considering that all day and all night she could not get him out of her head.

CHAPTER VII.

NOVEL ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

AT the end of a fortnight, which had been the longest in Dolly Chesney's life, she had forgotten the sensation of being a stranger in Bath. So much had been crowded into the time that quiet Spincourt had become entirely a thing of the past. From morning till night it had been one whirl of excitement. Now if she went into the ring, to which Lady Chesney was becoming reconciled as one of the inevitable changes of the age, she was surrounded by acquaintances, and might bow to several of the Amazons. The beautiful Duchess of Kingston was always to be seen riding, but too frequently, Dolly was beginning to think, with Sir Piers Ludlow at her side. She had her "humble servants" ever at her beck and call, if she chose to exert her power, but she was neither vain enough, nor indifferent enough, to take pleasure in their homage; her thoughts were ringing changes upon one name only. At

the end of a month the shy simple Dolly, who kept under her mother's wing at Spincourt, was still less easy of recognition in the little Miss Chesney of Bath, surrounded by a knot of admirers, more or less serious, who were teaching her to listen to her own praises with smiles instead of embarrassment. The somewhat capricious nature of Sir Piers' attentions was beginning to fret her, and it was a species of distraction to turn to those others for whom she did not really care. Between Cammy Thresher and Ludlow her small stock of experience was being rapidly enlarged, and she was learning the miseries of doubt and jealousy for which her happier hours scarcely compensated.

Lady Chesney had opened that oyster, society, with the trenchant weapon of good manners, backed with good connections, more powerful in this little clique than gold, and could trail her satin train through all the aristocratic saloons in Bath. The flunky rat-tat and the black boy bearing perfumed cards were as frequently at her door as at any; and Dolly's fair face bloomed at almost every *rout*, dance, and card-party that was given. With feminine aptness Dolly had trebled her list of accomplishments. She had learnt to make herself agreeable to people she disliked, to express opinions freely with the certainty that it did not matter how silly they were; to smile at the rivalries of those who dubbed themselves her faithful swains; to know spades from clubs, and hearts from diamonds, to be at ease in a train and hoop, to plot little ways of seeing Ludlow, to pretend indifference when she did meet him, and to attempt to rival the Duchess of Kingston in dress. Here, however, she failed, baffled by the slightness both of her figure and purse, in spite of Cammy's advice and assistance. Cammy, in her excess of friendship, had changed her milliners for Dolly's, and would sometimes say, "Love, you will not object, I am sure, if I have a few trifles put down in your bill instead of mine; Lady Di does make such a fuss, and your mamma is so kind. I will keep the strictest account, you may be sure, poor wretch though I be. But you know, love, you insist upon my going wherever you do, and I need so many gowns."

After this simple arrangement the bills ran up amazingly, and Cammy never seemed to remember to disentangle the two accounts, which threw Dolly into great perplexity, for she was afraid to tell her mother lest she should ruin Camilla's prospects in life.

Finding her daughter stuck upon a little pinnacle, Lady Chesney

herself became one of her worshippers; but she was beginning to feel a little impatient with Sir Piers Ludlow, who still showed no signs of making up his mind and confiding it to her. More than one acquaintance had expressed surprise that she had not married so fine a young lady as her daughter yet; and though she took care to say that there was no hurry, and that she could choose pretty well where she pleased, the remark gave her a twinge of vexation which she was apt to visit upon Dolly.

Meanwhile, Sir Apollo, whose conduct sometimes better suited the title of Apollyon, was roving at his own sweet will, as free as air, followed, but not fettered, by Dolly's worshipping hazel eyes, and Camilla's jealous black ones. Not a shade of pensiveness clouded his handsome reckless face, or checked the loud, ringing laugh, that was to be heard everywhere but in those long hours of cards, and wine, and dice, which Dolly only knew as a necessity of a gentleman's existence. Some of his acquaintances were wondering if he really intended making a matrimonial sacrifice of himself; for the idea had got about that Dolly Chesney was the heiress of Spincourt. This report like many others might doubtless be traced to Lady Di, or Camilla, but like a cuckoo's egg it had been dropped and disowned. Lady Di declared that the Duchess of Kingston had forbidden Ludlow's engagement, not choosing to dispense with one of the most agreeable of her captives, but others were of opinion that neither her Grace nor any one else could chain Sir Apollo to their chariot wheels a day longer than it pleased himself. Dolly was about the only person who did not know that his proceedings were a common topic of discussion, and that curious cynical eyes were watching her. So she fed merrily upon the honey she extracted from the flowers of every day, and laid up no store for the winter; for she dreamed of a perpetual summer, without blight, or wet days, or wasps or thunder-storms, but full of unfading roses, and eternal sunshine! And this in a world where she pitied so many for being dull and sad, for living on in the midst of dead leaves and fallen blossoms. She put the greatest confidence in Camilla, in spite of various shocks which her friendship had sustained. Cammy swore at times with the freedom of Lady Di, and took snuff, which Dolly "could not abide," though she carried a snuff-box, to be like other people, but what chiefly vexed her was that no reliance could be placed on Cammy's word, and that there was a strange disagreement between her words and actions.

All that glittered was, however, gold to Dolly; every stone that sparkled, a diamond of the purest water; so she filled her treasury with much brass and paste, before she had learnt the A B C of experience.

Lady Chesney was more and more convinced that the world had changed since her time, though she saw her surroundings with a very partial eye. The taste for gambling, which ebbs and flows, was at its high tide, and formed the ruling passion of men, women, and children. While lords and gentlemen were playing *tic-tac* and *ombre* in the club-rooms, their lackeys were doing the same on the stairs outside. The very apple-women in the streets kept wheels of fortune and dice on their stalls, round which the smallest and raggedest urchins crowded, while thimble-rig at the same time attracted groups of gaping, credulous speculators. Dolly, like a young bird all agape for whatever any one chose to put into its mouth, enjoyed the part she was permitted to play, and put into all the raffles which were furnished under the pleasing excitement of illegality. It was the training all those wretched women had had, whose lives were spent in labour that satisfieth not, who were staking home and happiness, peace and honour, upon those black and red dots, or the turn of a dice-box. Thus began that tyranny which, ever waxing stronger, seldom left its victim until it had crushed out and withered up soul and spirit, leaving a shrunken and trembling body, seemingly no higher than the beasts which perish, to return to its dust. Many a time did Camilla and Dolly laugh at those poor beings, the bloom on whose minds had vanished sooner than that on their cheeks, but not a few among them had been Cammys in their day, and, alack! more than one, at some far-away time, had been as ignorant and innocent as Dolly Chesney when she left Spincourt. What was the retrospect of those lives? Was memory the first thing staked, and conscience the second? These wrecks of womanhood, decorated with roses and diamonds to the very edge of the grave—shrill, greedy, eager, and bitter—though their voices were cracked, and their hands quivered, nourished the flickering flame of life with "cordial" slipped slyly into frequent cups of tea. And there were the men, to match them, whose age in this generation none could certify. Bewigged, padded, and stiffened with buckram, jaunty, ghastly, and smiling, thinking that they looked as young in the eyes of others as they did in their own; with all nobleness clean swept out of their lives; complaining now and then that the Bath waters had lost their virtues,

that all the women were ugly, and all the men ungentlemanlike boys, and presuming upstarts.

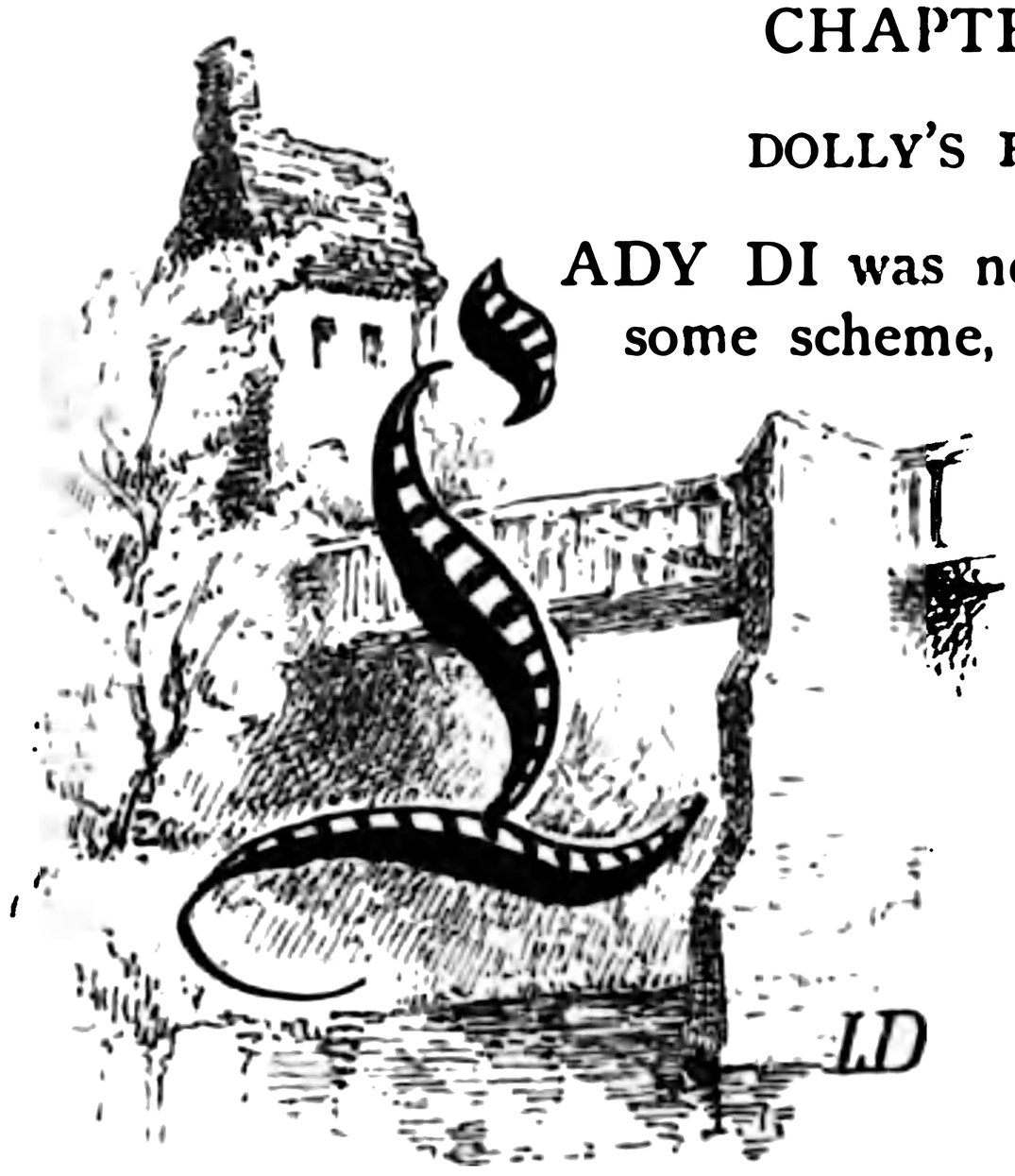
To keep the peace under his bauble sway, Nash had made a law, like the great potentate he was, which absolutely excluded politics,—and hotly as the battle raged elsewhere between Whig and Tory, the Bath waters were waters of Lethe as far as concerned public disagreements; and sworn foes might exchange friendly greetings or solemn compliments without in the least compromising their principles. Even Whig and Tory patches were not allowed to appear on ladies' cheeks and brows; they must be equally balanced, or they must retire into their little gold and silver boxes, until a return to town brings them out again to make their tiny mischief. This had been an important means of checking duelling, which the serene Nash abhorred; but in spite of him steel was sometimes drawn outside the walls; for though he could banish politics and put a veto on scandal, and turn swords out of the ballroom, jealousy and passion were not to be bound by rules, or kept out by closed doors. The green-eyed and the pale-faced made their way, though Nash smiled his blandest, or spoke his wittiest.

Among other novelties to which Dolly Chesney had been introduced was love-making *à la mode*. She had been likened to every goddess in heathendom, and every heroine of classic note. She had been assured that cold east winds were Paphian gales when breathed in her company; that a gravel walk, upon which a brass band was performing, was an Arcadian grove; that Venus and Cupid were ever hovering round, pointing to the blissful Temple of Hymen, which she might conjecture was typified by the grave old Abbey, or the little church at Spincourt. Hearts, darts, and flames were as profuse as on a modern penny valentine, and metaphorical torches flamed before her, but were inseparable in her imagination from those which the link-boys thrust nightly into the iron extinguishers on either side of the street doors. *Billets doux* dropped around her like hawthorn blossoms in May; they were pinned to her pincushion, though her new maid, recommended by Miss Thresher, was quite amazed to see them; they were rolled up in her patch-box, and tied into her fan, they came into her big prayer-book in St. Michael's Church, and tumbled out of parcels sent home from the milliners. They were so daintily perfumed that Dolly put them among her ribbons and laces; and so carefully written, that it was quite easy to read them. Those that were not very much mis-spelt,

and even in her eyes not utter rubbish, she fondly suspected came from Sir Piers, but when she suggested this to Camilla, she only laughed, and said Ludlow was not likely to put himself to so much trouble. Oh, Dolly, how insipid Spincourt would appear now! what tears and poutings would ensue if you were suddenly wafted there. No *billets doux*, no raffles, dancing, fun, frolic; no flattering eyes to follow the flutter of a ribbon or a curl; no playing Phillis to half a dozen Corydons, flinging a smile here and a frown there. Beyond all, no whispers from the voice that was sweeter than silver bells in the silly little ears that turned pink at its music; but a dead wilderness of green, an intolerable monotony of birds, bees, and flowers.

CHAPTER VIII.

DOLLY'S FORTUNE.



LADY DI was never herself unless she had on hand some scheme, be it ever so small, for amusement; any variety was welcome to her, but some sort of excitement she must have; a common disease certainly, not at all peculiar to my lady Di. One day her smart coach, which would have made a good figure in a procession of Hengler's or Sanger's, stopped in the Abbey Litten by appointment. One of the four powdered footmen from behind, alighted, and knocked at the door, and Camilla Thresher ran up-stairs to meet Lady Chesney and Dolly. The latter came out with a doleful countenance. "I am afraid, dear Miss Camilla," she said, "that you must go abroad without us to-day, my uncle is unwell, and my mamma does not like to leave him, 'tis *odiously* disappointing;" and Dolly pouted, and looked tearful.

Camilla returned to the carriage, bearing Lady Chesney's regrets, and Dolly murmured, "I shall have to go on with that tiresome bead work, and I am sick of sitting still." Lady Di was not so easily disposed of; back came Camilla to beg and insist that Dolly should be intrusted to her charge, and Lady Chesney could not refuse. Dolly ran to put on her scarlet "cardinal," and jumped into the carriage with a gleeful precipitance which would have called forth a reproof from her mother, had she seen it. "Oh, I am so happy, dear Lady Di!" she cried, "I was being moped to death; now where are we going?"

"To have your fortunes told, my love. Dr. Smith, the famous fortune-teller, is passing through Bath, and receives his visitors every day in Spring Gardens, though he puts up at the Castle Inn. I never get my complexion lotions from any one else, and I advise you, Miss Dolly, to lay in a stock; you are sure to need them; and I'm quite out of angelic snuff."

"What is that?"

"Lud! my dear, it cures headaches, and want of memory, and megrims, and all the rest of it. You'll do well to surprise your mamma with a box; 'tis worth its weight in gold. Cammy, 'tis on my mind that I have not chosen the right number for that lottery; I dreamed last night of 99, so I mean to consult Dr. Smith."

"But, about fortunes," said Dolly; "does he really tell what is going to happen?"

"Nothing can be more infallible than his prophecies, and he draws out horoscopes for every lady of fashion in Lunnon and Bath."

"You must try your luck, my love," said Camilla.

"Lud, how pleased I was to hear he was come," cried Lady Di. "And he came in a coach drawn by six bays, followed by a calash, and a *chasse-marine* and four. He has eight footmen, who are his merry-andrews, half in yellow, and half in blue and silver; and he has got a tight-rope dancer, and some tumblers. You must come some evening to see 'em, Miss Dolly, 'twill be purely amusing, and we'll get Ludlow and some of the fellows to join us in the fun."

Dolly was wondering if perchance Ludlow might be there to-day. "No one knew you were coming, I suppose," she said.

"Bless me, child, 'tis as hard to do anything in Bath without being seen, as it is to hide love. Half a dozen people asked me whither I was bound, and Ludlow was among them, but he was off with the princess to Bowood, I think he said."

Dolly smothered a sigh. They passed through the vineyards, where the vines were trained in foreign fashion, and the grapes were being gathered in, to Spring Gardens on the banks of the river. It was a favourite resort for tea-drinking and coquetting, especially of an evening; and here the notorious quack had set up his crimson silk tent, and preyed upon the sordid superstition of the upper and middle classes. Over the tent door was traced his motto, "*Argento laborat Faber*," which Lady Di informed Dolly was something vastly funny in Greek or Hebrew; and

at the entrance stood two fantastically attired sentinels, who announced comers with a flourish of brazen trumpets, and withdrew the silken curtain to admit the trembling searchers into the future. The sage was discovered seated on a dais, attired in what he supposed to be the costume of an Eastern magician, with a full curled wig, and an Indian pipe. Lady Di's rubicund countenance almost turned a shade paler, as, in a deferential manner, she requested a private interview. Her companions remained out of earshot while a long confabulation took place, which ended in Lady Di being loaded with boxes and bottles of all descriptions, and a sealed scrap of parchment containing the lucky number for the lottery.

"I'm terribly frightened, Miss Cammy," said Dolly.

"Oh, I'm dying for my turn, so I will go first; 'tis so charming to know the man you are to marry, it may save a world of blunders. Oh, stars! I have forgot my purse; and not a syllable shall I hear unless I show the money first. Lend me a trifle, my sweet girl, if you have any friendship for your poor Camilla."

Cammy's consultation took up some time, and then came Dolly's turn. She was too bewildered and alarmed to make any sense out of the sepulchral mutterings of the wizard; it is possible that Fine-ear himself might have been at a loss occasionally. He showed a most extraordinary acquaintance with her history, and asked some very home questions. Dolly began to tremble at her audacity in meddling with supernatural powers. She made out that an adverse conjunction in the house of Venus assured her of a rival, a fair-haired lady with eyes of sapphire blue. After a little necromancy, and much waving of a peeled willow wand, he informed her that her fate was twined with an individual of another nation, and that any obstacles now existing between them would be broken and scattered. Then he dismissed her, after condescending to accept all the money Cammy had left in her purse, and she went back to her friends looking rather downcast.

"And what did he say, love?" inquired Camilla eagerly.

Dolly clasped her hands, and hurriedly whispered, "I would not tell you now for all the world, 'twas something most serious, but I will tell you all when we can be private."

"What, not a word to say?" cried Lady Di, pinching Dolly's cheek. "I fancy the wizard has made some shrewd hits. Did he say that Apollo was flirting with Mistress Belinda Sturges, eh, Dolly?"

Dolly looked aghast. "Who is she?—what do you mean, my lady?"

"Bless your heart, my chicken, Apollo must flirt, you know; it goes for nothing."

"Cammy, who is Mistress Belinda Sturges?" asked Dolly, appealingly.

"Why, she is no other than Mistress Belinda Sturges, cousin to the Duchess of Kingston, just arrived on a visit to her Grace, and the toast of the town, my love, nothing more."

Dolly did not mean to betray herself before Lady Di.

"You have not told us anything that the wizard said to you, Miss Camilla," she said.

"He said—oh, what did he say?—a host of things, but I was on no account to repeat them."

"Dear, how disappointing; just tell me if he promised you to be happy."

"Amazingly so, love; but special luck at brag, which was what I was most concerned about."

Dolly was much exercised in mind about that blue-eyed basilisk whom she was beginning to connect with the unknown Belinda, "the toast of the town," and a far more dangerous rival, she was inclined to believe, than the Duchess of Kingston.

On account of Mr. Bellingham's indisposition Dolly was kept more within doors than usual; and Lady Chesney was obliged to refuse several invitations, over which disappointments poor Dolly wept in secret. The town house of the Kingstons was not far from the Abbey Litten; and Dolly spent half her time looking out for the carriage, and for Sir Piers Ludlow, in case he should pass that way; but as the Abbey Litten was rather further from the gay part of the city than Kingston House, several days passed without her catching a glimpse of Mistress Sturges. She heard of her, however, for Camilla kept her well informed as to her movements, as well as those of Ludlow. Alas for Dolly's peace of mind! the two seemed to move in exactly the same orbit, but she tried to explain away this, by the well-known exactingness of the duchess, and by the fact that they were both obliged to wait constantly upon the princess. One of the princess's receptions took place just now, and Dolly drowned herself in tears because she could not go. Her inquiries after her uncle were pathetic, and very constant, but he would not get better; the gout held

him tight. The first time she was able to go on to the ramparts she flew at Camilla as if she held her fate in her hands.

"Cammy, Cammy, where is she?—where is he—is he—are they here? Tell me quickly, I conjure you, my beloved friend!"

"My love, you look distracted. He is not worth it, I assure you. Where his highness may be I cannot inform you, but for your comfort, Mistress Sturges has taken a slight catarrh, and is confined to the house; there, you may imagine her with red eyes and nose, and be happy."

Dolly sighed. "'Twould not make me happy; I don't think anything would, dearest Cammy. I wish I could forget, I wish I could begin again. There's no pleasure in anything."

Camilla gave her peculiar shrug of the shoulders. "Well, my love, why don't you?" she said, curtly.

"I can't," answered Dolly.

"Look! there he is," said Camilla, as Sir Piers came on to the terrace.

Dolly held her arm, and turned red and white.

"I wish—I wish he would not come," she faltered.

He joined them directly; complained of not having seen Mistress Dolly for a century, and was as *débonnaire* and charming as usual. Camilla asked after Mistress Sturges; he professed to know nothing about her; had she a catarrh? Oh, fine ladies always fancied something ailed them, it was nothing he was sure; he seemed to have no thought to spare for her just then. Dolly cheered up, and began to accuse herself of ridiculous fancies.

"You are going to accompany us to Spring Gardens to-morrow, are you not?" Dolly asked, with beseeching eyes.

"'Tis not likely I should be able to resist so pleasing an invitation," quoth Piers, smilingly; and she went home happy.

The party to visit the conjurer, under the leadership of Lady Di, was made up, and a fine evening saw Dr. Smith surrounded by the fashion of Bath. There was a swarm of wigs and masks round his crimson tent—the masks such as ladies wore when in public places—small bits of black silk. Dolly thought she had never seen anything so lovely as the artificial cascades, the coloured lamps, like the jewels of Aladdin's garden, the spar summer-houses and grottos with stained windows.

"'Tis Arcadia, truly!" she exclaimed. So it was to her, for she was walking with Ludlow, and he was brilliant and tender by turns, full of pretty compliments and conceits; and she was not treading common earth or breathing common air as they strolled through green arcades in the twilight, hearing the hum of voices and the strains of music beyond the clipt yew hedges. The wand of a more potent enchanter than the wizard of Spring Gardens had waved over her. After the golden link, the iron link. There came the tap of a fan on Ludlow's shoulder, and a clear ringing voice cried laughingly to "halt." Dolly's castle came tumbling about her ears in sudden ruin.

"Ludlow," said the Duchess of Kingston, whom Dolly knew at once, though she was masked, "my cousin, Miss Belinda Sturges, with whom you have some slight acquaintance, I think, has taken it into her wilful head that you, and you only, shall escort her through the magic circle to have her fortune told. You are highly honoured; she has flouted the other men, and vows you promised to take her."

Mistress Sturges took off her mask, and disclosed the "cranberry white and red" of her complexion, and a great pair of turquoise eyes.

"I thought, sir, you would be at the gate; I am not used to wait, I assure you," she said haughtily.

"Why are you lagging, Sir Apollo?" cried the duchess; "I will see Mistress Chesney to her friends.—How is your good uncle, my dear?—Now take this mad, wicked minx off my hands at once, you dear, handsome fellow; I shall be glad to get rid of her, and you can quarrel as much as you did t'other night at the play."

"Pray do not suppose I forgot that Mistress Belinda was pleased to express a wish to have her hand read," began Ludlow.

"Express a wish, forsooth!" repeated the young lady, scornfully. "Be quite assured, Sir Piers, that if you wish to shirk your promise, I shall not hold you to it."

"When I shall wish to shirk a promise made to Mistress Sturges, I shall merit being pecked to death by Venus' doves and sparrows," said Ludlow, smiling. "But 'tis unlucky that, at this moment, I cannot, by any stroke of enchantment, become two men."

"Be content to let others have their chance," said the duchess; "you carry off more than your share as it is, wretch."

Little Mistress Chesney could have burst out a-crying without more

ado, and hid her face in her pinafore. Piers looked earnestly at her; she cast one reproachful glance, and turned away. The duchess caught her hand laughingly.

"Come, child, don't be in a pet; this Belinda Sturges has had her way in everything since she was dandled in her nurse's arms! See, here are your friends; I shall leave you with Miss Thresher. Hark, Miss Dolly, never show a man you place any value on his company; if you do, he will not care a straw about yours. Adieu."

Camilla, who was walking between two gentlemen, stopped and whispered—

"My sweet girl, I see you have lit upon your enemy. Come with us, and make believe you are enjoying yourself prodigiously."

Her eyes, as well as her tongue, had a sharpness peculiar to herself; she had taken in the state of affairs at a glance.

"I must make known to you the Count de Bressy," she said, introducing one of her companions; "'tis what he is always praying me to do; but you have been so mewed up of late, that it has not been possible."

M. de Bressy was a Frenchman, whom Lady Di had recently added to her train; he was supposed to be in England for political reasons, and had done his best to make exile agreeable. He spoke bad English volubly, and was inclined to share his shadowy honours with a rich English wife, could he be so fortunate as to secure one. He plumed himself upon a talent for delicate flattery, which he imagined would prove irresistible, and he was disposed to exercise it upon "Me-es" Dolly, having learnt from Camilla, whose memory must sadly have failed her, that that pleasing young blonde was the heiress of Spincourt. Therefore he remained by her side from the moment of introduction, sparing her all trouble in finding conversation, for which she was grateful, and enlarging upon the perfections of the English "Me-es." If she had had eyes for any one but Sir Piers, she might have considered him attractive and handsome. He was clever in his way, and knew how to make the most of slight advantages; he could adapt himself to the humour of those he wished to please, and he could tell his story so as to excite interest. Dolly began by disliking him; she ended the day by sympathizing with his misfortunes. But meanwhile she was wondering what Ludlow was saying to Mistress Belinda, and if the beauty were as cross as she had appeared at first—if he was sorry to leave her, and a thousand other "ifs" which pricked her like so many

needles. She gloomily watched the tumblers performing their antics, and stared with eyes full of tears at the merry-andrews, while every one else was shrieking with laughter; and then was swept away with the rest of the party to partake of supper, with the best appetite she could muster. No, she would not eat; she sat in a corner, wrapped tightly in her little red cloak, and declared that her head ached. Camilla squeezed her hand, and whispered—

"Cheer up, love, and forget the wretch; don't let him see you melancholy and mumpish."

She answered shortly that she was not troubling herself about any one A young damsel in a fit of ill-temper was no unusual sight; sulks and tears were as common as showers in April, so no one took much notice of her. Lady Di offered her a pinch of angelic snuff, and M. de Bressy brought a tankard of Burgundy as balm to wounded affections; but Prince Charming's place remained vacant, and she continued inconsolable. At length in came the recreant knight, full of apologies. Lady Di began to abuse him roundly, and to swear she would throw him over altogether if he did not mend his manners. He went down on one knee, to beseech pardon, explained that Mistress Belinda had played the tyrant, and kept him tossing her in a swing; that he neither deserved nor wished for supper, but that the duchess had insisted upon his attending her, in her arbour, and would take no refusal. Lady Di gave him a sounding blow with her fan.

"Take your handsome, good-for-nothing face away," she cried, "you dear, tormenting wretch!"

He murmured a few words to Dolly about his evening's happiness being lost, and then hurried away, throwing back a glance of regret, which banished all her resentment.

The fun began to run high among the others, but Dolly could not join in it; she was wondering if it was possible that he was tired of her, and, it so, was it her own fault? what had she done to merit desertion? Then again she came round to the idea that he was kept away against his will.

It was now growing dark, and little lamps were glowing in all the avenues like necklaces of precious stones, while fireworks were being let off, which at another time would have been most splendid in Dolly's eyes; but there was an incongruity between blighted hopes—the cheerful splutter, rush, and blaze of rockets—and the shouts of delight which hailed their

appearance. There was a doubtful pleasure in looking on, with only the Frenchman to say pretty things, while distance lent enchantment to the view of Ludlow exchanging snuff-boxes, and pretending to spar with the fair Belinda. Dolly's eyes turned to the pair wherever they went, as the compass of the faithful turns to Mecca. Feeling very desolate, she suddenly clasped Camilla's hand, and whispered—

"Oh, Cammy, 'tis too wretched, 'tis too unkind!"

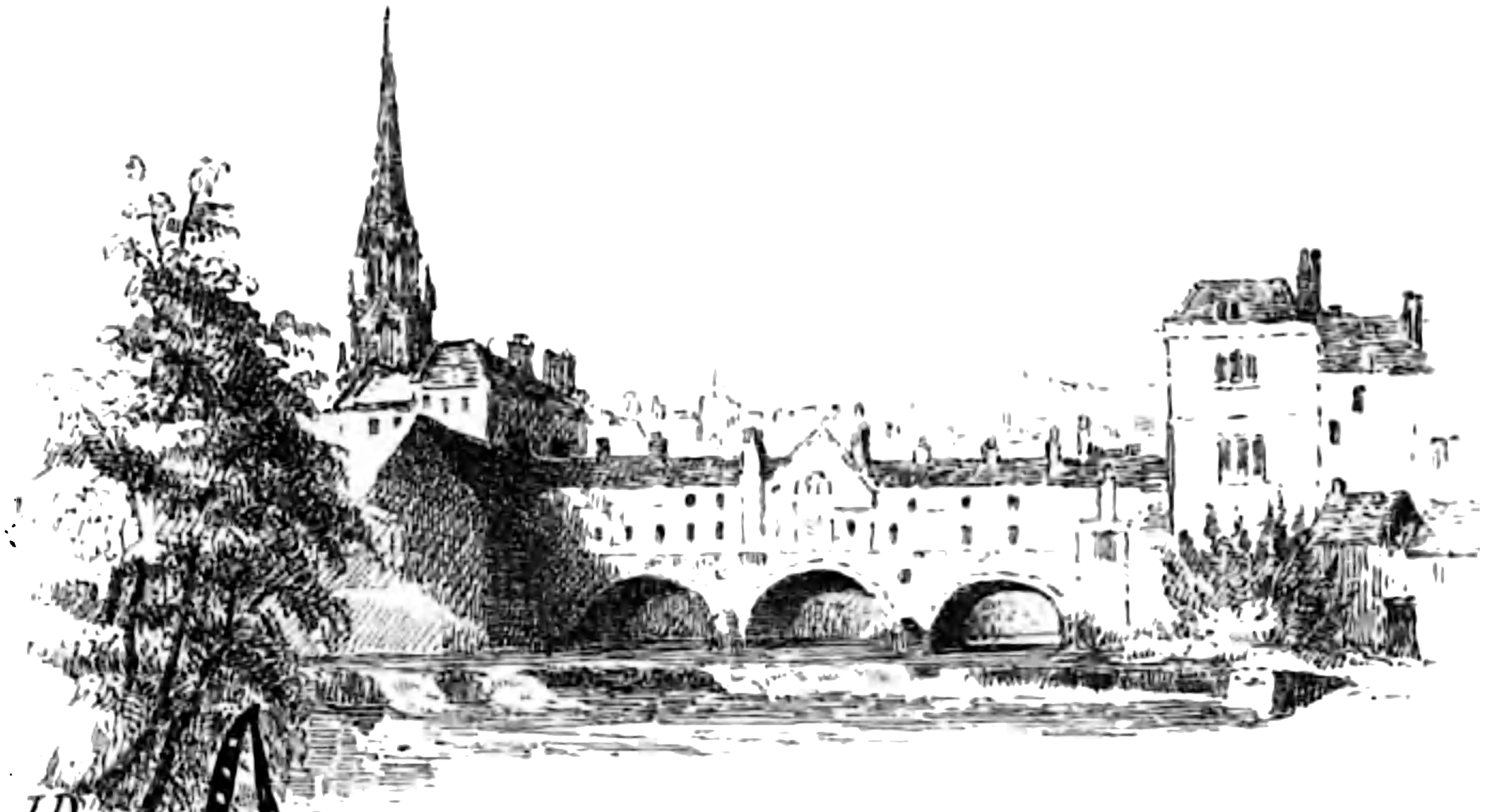
A flash of scorn lit up Mistress Thresher's face, as she shook her off.

"Tut, little simpleton! you go about the way to make him never speak to you again. Amuse yourself with the Frenchman, and show a little spirit."

Dolly tried to hide her face under her little red hood, and the rockets went up, and burst, and showered down their gold through a mist of tears. Cammy had never spoken unkindly to her before. Of course, the red cloak was folded over a broken heart—and life, from the seventeen-year-old point of sight, is such a long affair to be one gray blank! But meanwhile, even while thinking this, Dolly was twisting words, unconsciously distorting facts, and choosing her lens in order to see her pretty idol in the best possible aspect. Lady Di was angry when she saw her sad face, for she expected her party to be always in high spirits; Piers came no more, but was kept in close attendance—poor victim!—on the beautiful heiress, and Dolly cried herself to sleep as an appropriate finish to a day's pleasure.

CHAPTER IX.

MY LADY'S FRIENDS.



ALTHOUGH Lady Chesney did not go out much during the illness of her brother, she did not deny herself to visitors. One day she was surprised by a visit from her old friend Madam Zinzan, as the Berkshire people called her; she had come down to St. Ann's Court to enjoy the company of her two sons. She was a grand and stately lady, well educated for those times, who had travelled abroad, and lived in London, who took an interest in passing events, and had been acquainted with most of the remarkable characters of her time. Among uncongenial people she was reckoned stiff and old-fashioned, but she had a truly kind heart beating under much whalebone, and was worshipped by the country people round her, in spite of amazing baskets of quackery which she and her able-bodied waiting-woman carried periodically through the village. Unlimited faith in terrible combinations unknown in the present century, and docility in swallowing the contents of her bottles, were rewarded by baskets of another sort, full

of good things, which made the mothers smile, and the children suck their fingers in delicious anticipation. Hearty scoldings were more than compensated by blankets, and coal and clothing almost made up for the vexation of having to keep the cottages tidy and clean. She kept up the old feasts and sports, and, in fact, her rule smacked very much of the feudal system, and was, of course, subversive of true British liberty! She was one of the last of her kind; in the nineteenth century there would have been no place for her, yet her children rose up and called her blessed.

The two old school-friends were delighted to meet, but when they had repeated that several times, they found little else to say. Lady Chesney could think of nothing but Bath, and Madam Zinzan knew little of it, except through persons who were quite outside Lady Di Buckler's clique. Fortunately there was Dolly to be looked at and praised; Lady Chesney hoped she was acquiring a more modish air, she had feared she had kept her so long in the country that she would never have got over her awkwardness. Dolly sat, working her tent-stitch, and looking very pretty and modest, so Madam Zinzan was inclined to be pleased with her.

"I do not think Miss Dolly favours your ladyship," she observed.

"Indeed? It has been observed that she has the same turn of the throat that I have, but her features are certainly less regular than mine; but the Chesneys were reckoned a handsome family, quite second to the Bellinghams in the county. 'Tis a sad piece of work having a girl upon one's hands, I assure you, madam, and 'specially one who is not quite a fright; and one is not disposed to part with her very speedily, even though nothing would be easier. I vow 'tis more difficult when a young lady is beset with admirers than when you have some half-dozen ordinary girls who have no ambition, and though at Spincourt I bred up Dolly with the most perfect strictness, 'tis purely impossible to have my eye always upon her at Bath. To be sure Dolly does not need it, for her friends are all such as I should have chosen before all others; 'tis surprising the number of well-bred people one has the honour of meeting here. Have you any acquaintance with Lady Di Buckler, madam? She is the daughter of the Marquis of C——."

"None whatever, your ladyship; but I have heard her named as an odious, vulgar woman."

Lady Chesney looked offended.

"She happens to be an intimate friend of mine. Certainly her manners

lack the dignity, which I have heard termed stiffness, of the past generation; but there is a genial warmth of heart, to which I attribute all her little eccentricities, which more than compensates. Her *protégée*, Miss Camilla Thresher, who is quite like her own child, has a great friendship for Dolly. She is a nice, quiet girl."

"You surprise me," said Madam Zinzan. "I had heard very differently; but doubtless you are better informed than I am."

"I fear the goodness of your heart causes you to place too much reliance upon the tales you hear, dear madam. You may depend upon it, Miss Camilla is a discreet and amiable young person. I am convinced that when a young lady is introduced to society, the selection of her friends is of the first importance; therefore, I need not say that I have paid particular attention to it for Dolly. I may flatter myself that no one can call me injudicious."

"Truly, the choice of a friend is of next importance to that of a husband," said Madam Zinzan, who, allowing for a little excusable vanity in her friend, was quite ready to consider her the most careful and wise of mothers.

"I dare say, madam, you are surprised that I have not married Dolly yet?" said Lady Chesney, who was beginning to feel sensitive on that point. "Dolly, go and sit with your uncle."

Little Miss Chesney gathered up her silks, and did as she was bid, wishing she could leave one ear behind, to hear what was said on so interesting a subject.

"But I owe it to my child to take the utmost heed in so important a concern. However, to a very old friend I may permit myself to hint that it is on the point of being settled; in short, that I have in prospect a very brilliant match for her."

"I am sensibly delighted to hear it; I shall be truly pleased to see so sweet-looking, pretty-behaved a young lady as Miss Dolly married to a gentleman calculated by his heart and character to make her happy," said Madam Zinzan, warmly.

"Dolly would grace a high position, unless my partiality mislead me," remarked Lady Chesney. "But I confess her brilliant prospects may well excite envy. Good birth, a splendid fortune, a noble person—one who is favoured by royalty, and is a leader of fashion. Upon my word, Miss Dolly is likely to be a vastly happy young lady!"

As Lady Chesney drew this portrait of her son-in-law elect, both he and Dolly rose in her estimation.

"It would ill become me to say that being a leader of fashion is incompatible with those solid parts which secure domestic felicity, my dear friend," said Madam Zinzan; "but you will allow that the union is rare. But I am sure you reckon with me, that virtue ranks before the most elegant behaviour; and with all my heart I wish pretty Miss Dolly happy. Is it indiscreet to inquire the name of this fortunate gentleman?"

"You comprehend, dear madam, that this is in the strictest confidence—not to go further on any account? Well, then, I refer to Sir Piers Ludlow, a young baronet, of whom no doubt you have heard."

"I cannot call to mind any acquaintance with him, but I remember his mother well—a sweet, lovely creature; but they used to call her Madcap Liddy. Well, indeed it gives me great pleasure, and I doubt not that Sir Piers Ludlow is a very amiable young gentleman. My son Grenville chooses his friends with the most admirable judgment, and I have little doubt that, having been in Bath together with Sir Piers, he has sought him out. I fear sober worth is rare among the young gentlemen of the day."

Lady Chesney could not help thinking that it was not quite characteristic of Sir Piers, but she made no remark on that score. She inwardly chafed at the idea of his being patronized by that grim, quiet Mr. Zinzan, with whom he would scarcely care to exchange a word.

"Sir Piers is, in a slight degree, haughty and reserved, as becomes his station," she observed.

At this instant the door was flung open, and Lady Di Buckler entered, followed by the usual half-dozen minor stars. They looked curiously at Madam Zinzan, who returned their stares without quailing, equally curious to see what kind of company her old friend kept. Dolly was summoned back, and came in looking fair and slim and eager; she was always eager to have a talk with Camilla now. M. de Bressy was one of the party; he found a seat near Dolly, and threw a world of sentiment into his shifty dark eyes when he addressed her. The others, ranged on stiff back chairs, nodding their heads like dandelion puffs, shaking with laughter at Lady Di's jokes, and skimming the cream of Bath tittle-tattle without fear of Mr. Nash, excited the liveliest horror in the mind of Madam Zinzan, who sat balancing her tea-cup on the tips of three fingers, compressing her lips, as

though she was afraid of suddenly speaking her mind. If this was the usual style of conversation among the "well-bred" friends of Lady Chesney, she grieved for poor Dolly; and when she saw that the girl was listening to the flatteries of a "French monsieur," she could have groaned aloud. But Dolly was not absorbed by the charms of this foreign poison; she left the count as soon as possible, and took her station by the tea-table, filling the rare "chany" cups as they were emptied. Monsieur's employment was now to hand ratafias, which he did very gracefully. Camilla came up, and drew a chair to the table.

"What piece of antiquity have you there, Miss Dolly?" she asked behind her fan.

"'Tis Madam Zinzan, from St. Ann's Court."

"Bless me! no other than the parent of the whey-faced curate, and that odious miser."

"Is he indeed a miser, Cammy?"

"So I am credibly informed. He will not even risk a sixpence at cards; he is never known to join in the diversions of other gentlemen; and when he condescends to enter society, he looks on as though he were at a play, forsooth! Oh, you may be sure he does not think we are good enough to associate with."

"Nay, indeed, he must be terribly ill-natured."

"I should not be surprised if this Madam Formality has come down to arrange a match between you and one of her sons, my dear."

"How can you be so unkind as to say such a thing, Cammy?" cried Dolly.

"La, I think 'twould be delightful; which is't to be, the parson or the miser?" pursued Camilla, bent on teasing.

"I am sure my mamma would not think of such a thing, so I will not be tormented by thinking about it."

"No, love, you need not cry over it yet, you have your good Frenchman to rescue you; he would challenge the pair of them. 'Tis plain he is dying for you, Miss Dolly; he is a monstrous handsome fellow."

"For a black man," said Dolly, indifferently.

"No need to flout him, my love," continued Camilla; "you will be thought nothing of unless you have one faithful swain at least to sing your praises."

"I'm fairly sick of pretending to be happy, Miss Camilla."

"Pish! put some sugar into my dish of tea, and don't let me hear you talk like a love-lorn shepherdess. We are not going to dress your grave with flowers yet awhile, there are more Corydons than one in the world, child."

Dolly said no more; and soon after Madam Zinzan called her to sit by her, and have a little conversation. Dolly did not feel the slightest interest in answering her remarks, which was all she attempted to do, and when Lady Di and her satellites took their leave, she wished she could be allowed to accompany them. She was dismayed when she heard her mamma accede to Madam's proposal of taking her to the pump-house to hear the band; but there was no escape. She was carried off in the big rumbling Zinzan coach, and set down by the side of her formidable *chaperon*, on a bench between the pump-room doors. She was cut off from her acquaintances, whom she saw parading the room in parties, and had nothing to do but to watch wearily for that wicked Prince Charming, whom she had not seen since the evening in Spring Gardens. Madam Zinzan discoursed upon the men of note scattered among the groups of idlers, with most of whom she exchanged a few words. A dowager, in a grass-green satin sacque, came and planted herself in front of Dolly, who, peeping round this large obstacle to view, saw Camilla and Ludlow enter the room together. For ten anxious minutes he remained, and then went out without taking any notice of her. Camilla, who had not appeared to see her till then, came and took a seat next her.

"Why art thou in the mumps, Phillida?" she asked gaily.

"Did not he see me, Camilla? Well, indeed, 'twas difficult, penned in as I am."

"Pooh!" said Camilla—

"'If she whom love doth honour
Be concealed from day,
Set a thousand guards upon her,
Love will find out the way.'

If Ludlow had been seeking you, my love, a thousand-and-one broad green satin backs would not have hidden you. He thought Mistress Sturges was here; he has bought her the loveliest trinket of blue enamel and pearl, painted with an Arcadian group. 'Tis heiresses that get all the pretty things, just because they can buy as many as they like for themselves!"

"I believe you delight in telling me these things, Cammy! You are resolved to make me believe that Sir Piers would fain quarrel with me."

"My love, I am the best friend you have, so make no more ado about the matter. Behold your friend's interesting son. Who would have thought of meeting him here? My dear, 'tis a part of the plot, you may depend."

"Well, madam," said the elder Mr. Zinzan, approaching his mother; "so I find you in the merry-go-round of gaieties. The wisest heads are liable to turn beneath the rule of unreason. Are you pleased with the music here?"

"'Tis very fairly good, though 'twould not please the more instructed ears of Bernard; 'tis well enough for you and me, my son. Now take Mistress Dolly Chesney for a promenade. I doubt not that she is weary of sitting with an old woman."

Dolly was obliged to accept Zinzan's offer of escort, though she did not think it was very cordially given, and in his conversation she could hear that he was sacrificing his inclinations to civility. Mentally comparing him with Ludlow, she pronounced him a bear. He was, besides, dressed with a sober plainness which, with his grave air, made him appear much beyond his real age. He thought her merely one of Lady Di's *protégées*, and felt a gulf between them that was not worth his while to try and bridge over, "a poor, silly child, following the other moths about the candle," and wished his mother had not set him to entertain her. What did she know or care about the things which interested him? and what did he, being rudely shaken out of the glamour, care for those that interested her? A door opened, and in came Mistress Belinda Sturges, rustling among the other silks and satins, attended by Piers Ludlow. Dolly had not learnt perfect concealment of her feelings yet; her eyes wandered restlessly after them; she bit her lips nervously, and changed colour. Zinzan saw it, and thought, "the wings are singed already, poor wretch!" At that moment Mr. Nash bustled through the crowd, in the whitest of wigs and an elaborate costume of peach and orange, and laid a finger on his arm.

"Pardon, dear sir," he whispered, with an air of hushed importance. "One moment snatched from the Graces. What think you of a short address—appeal from me to this brilliant assembly upon the subject of the hospital?"

"No one can feel the pulse or the purse of Bath as well as you can, Mr. Nash; make the attempt, by all means."

Nash waved his cream-coloured beaver to the orchestra for silence, and mounted on a bench at the end of the room. There was an immediate lull in the buzz of voices, of which he seized advantage to address them in a complimentary prologue, witty enough to extract a few laughs. Faces were observed, however, to fall when he came to the pith of his speech, and the baleful word subscription was heard. He told them that he had planned the building of a hospital, and said that he was sure he had but to name it in order to touch their hearts and loose their purse-strings. He knew his audience, from the old beau with the soul of a parched pea, who would give his guinea because his neighbour the duke pulled out half a dozen, to the good-natured gambler who would fling away the fifty he had won the night before, and go away to drive some wretch to despair by doing the like again that very evening. And few hearts are unmoved at the idea of physical suffering, so the silken purses came in goodly numbers to light, and, beaver in hand, His Majesty of Bath went round, smiling and bowing, and making appropriate speeches to every one.

"I vow," cried Lady Di, "I would have been glad to give to the poor beggars, but positively I'm not worth a stiver!"

"We'll take pledges, my lady; pretty ears need no brilliants to adorn them," Nash replied, significantly.

Lady Di laughed, swore, and flung down her jewelled ear-drops.

"There, that must compound for a deal of card-playing and frolic!" she exclaimed. "I shall be the patron saint of the hospital; Nash and I will have statues put up in front of it, I swear we will—beaver, and eardrops, and all!"

Camilla loudly regretted having forgotten her purse, and borrowed a guinea from Mr. Simmonds; Miss Sturges flipped in a five-pound note, vowing it was all nonsense—that when people were ill, they had much better stay at home, and not trouble their neighbours to build hospitals for them; it was sheer encouragement of dangerous, discontented, ungrateful classes. Sir Piers dropped three or four gold pieces through his slim white fingers, laughingly declaring that Mr. Nash was fleecing them all; and Dolly hastily emptied her little purse. Mr. Zinzan nodded to Nash, and passed the hatful by without adding to it.

"Just what Cammy said. How shocking to be miserly!" thought Dolly

He said to her—

"I doubt that, with all this show of guineas, the hospital will be long a-building."

And the event proved he was right; but Dolly fancied he was trying to excuse his want of benevolence.

And now Mr. Nash attacked the dowager in green satin, who was the Duchess of Q——. She dropped a stately curtsy.

"I regret much having left my purse at home; but Mr. Nash may be sure I shall not forget his noble charity."

Nash bowed profoundly.

"My purse is at your Grace's service," he said, pulling it out, and beginning to count some guineas. I am proud to lend your Grace five——"

"Thank'ye, Mr. Nash."

"Ten——"

"Thank'ye, thank'ye!"

"Twenty, thirty——"

"Stop, Nash, there's a good soul—stop!"

"Forty, fifty——"

"The man will ruin me!"

But, in spite of her efforts to restrain his liberal hand, eighty guineas were told down to her account, amid profuse thanks and suppressed titters; for her Grace was known never lightly to part with a single penny.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE SPIDER'S WEB.

"YOUR uncle's a deal worse, my lamb," were the words with which Mrs. Bonthram greeted Dolly on her return. "Such a fit of the gout as never was, and hot pepper nothing to his temper, and my lady in such a way."

Madam Zinzan immediately offered to take Dolly to her house. Lady Chesney came out to say how worried she was about the child. She was no use at home, and she foresaw for herself constant attendance upon her brother.

"I fear St. Ann's Court would be nothing better than a state prison to Mistress Dolly," said Zinzan; "and you, madam, must not fatigue yourself by running about to the balls and routs which are a necessity to young ladies."

"Fiddlesticks, Mr. Zinzan," said his mother; "in my day people did not know what it was to feel fatigue."

"Odious man!" was Dolly's reflection; "he does not want my company," and she looked so appealingly at her mother that Lady Chesney hesitated to accept Madam's invitation for her.

"You are vastly kind, but Dolly has never been parted from me, dear madam," she said.

"Then should you wish to send her at any time, my house is always open to you, and I'll promise to take the strictest care of the young lady," said Madam Zinzan.

When they had gone, Dolly flew up-stairs, and wrote, in a cramped round hand, a billet to Lady Di Buckler, which she dispatched by her maid Sally. In less than half an hour good-natured Lady Di had dispatched her coach, and her own woman, with a pressing request that

Dolly might be allowed to pay her a visit in order to leave Lady Chesney perfectly free to wait on her brother.

The end was that Dolly was sent to Kingsmead Square, in a fluster of excitement, to be heartily embraced by Lady Di, who loved novelty, and received with a cynical welcome from Camilla. She was installed in a small room opening out of Mistress Thresher's, with a four-post bed which filled up half its space, and a window looking into the rather dismal prospect of Kingsmead Square. Dolly began to feel shy and lonely, and could not pluck up courage to go down to supper until Camilla came to fetch her; for a marvel Lady Di saw no company that night, so the three played cards together the whole evening. At supper appeared the hitherto invisible Mr. Buckler, whose existence Dolly had scarcely realized. He took no notice of her, and only opened his lips to swear at his servant, and wrangle with Lady Di. At length her ladyship called his attention to the presence of a guest.

"What is it to me?" he grumbled. "You've always a pack o' fools playing pranks about the house. Do you suppose I care to speak to one of 'em?"

Dolly could have sunk through the floor with dismay at this speech, but Lady Di was not in the least disconcerted.

"You mustn't pay any attention to what he says, Miss Dolly; 'tis his nature to be uncivil and cross-grained," she said.

"All alike," muttered the old man. "Cammy's a bit more of a knave than t others; I like her the better for that."

"He's under my thumb, my dear," said Camilla, "otherwise he or I should have left long ago."

"John," cried Lady Di to Mr. Buckler's servant, "what a fool you are to allow your master that port wine. He's unbearable enough, without giving him an extra fit of gout."

"Will you allow me to manage my own affairs?" shouted her husband.

Camilla broke in with a peremptory order that he should hold his tongue. "If I let him talk he will frighten you into fits," she said to Dolly, "and very likely pull the cloth off the table with everything on it. 'Tis a happy household, is it not?"

Dolly was shocked beyond words; she had been accustomed to the strictest courtesy at home. She began to dread her visit being prolonged.

"Is it always like this?" she asked of Camilla, when they went up to bed.

"Why he was a lamb to-day," she answered. "Sometimes he and my lady have a pitched battle, and fling things at each other's heads. When my lady does lose her temper, I can tell you she is a perfect fiend."

"I thought her so good-natured."

"So she is, in her way; now, make haste, and when you have dismissed Sally, I shall come and have a chat with you." Accordingly, Miss Thresher came into Dolly's room, like an old-fashioned ghost, in a white dressing-gown of many capes, and sat upon the edge of her bed. Dolly was beginning to feel herself utterly helpless in Mistress Camilla's hands, and to dread what she would make her do or say next.

"To-day I had some talk with a humble servant of yours," began Cammy, "M. de Bressy, as you may guess. The man is distracted with love for your blonde hair and large eyes, my dear."

"Well, that is not very interesting," said Dolly. "I don't care to hear about it."

"I hope you don't mean to treat the poor fellow badly, miss. Upon my word, I think you coquet shamefully with him!"

"Cammy, you don't mean that?" cried Dolly, quite aghast.

"I think you are a very sly girl, Dolly Chesney, and a heartless, to behave so to a man who adores you to distraction. A nobleman, too, banished from his own country, the victim of his patriotism. Good heavens! you don't deserve such devotion."

"You know, Cammy, I never gave him a thought."

"Then he may well complain. Do you know that night after night he walks in front of your house; that he weeps and sighs over a ribbon of yours, that he eats next to nothing? If we hear that he has destroyed himself, you may know whose fault it is."

"But, Camilla, I took all his fine speeches for civility. I am sure I blame myself; if I knew how to avoid him, I would never speak to him again."

"That would be the worst thing you could do, and merely drive him frantic at once. No; you must continue to keep up a friendship with him. That, at least, is his due. We shall meet him at the play to-morrow, and you can well be civil, without encouraging his pretensions."

"Do you know, Miss Camilla, I have never been to a play yet, for I

have heard my mamma say that they are not fit to be witnessed by gentlewomen; so I think you must leave me at home."

"Fiddle-de-dee!" cried Mistress Thresher. "Whoever heard of such an antiquated notion! Besides, you may put on your mask, and then what matters! and, as for listening, I am sure Lady Di never rattles so loud as when she is at the play. Pray do not be so mighty particular, setting up to be better than other people."

Lady Di was peremptory; Dolly should go to the play, such whimsies were not to be borne with; so they set off to Lindsey's Rooms, where the performance took place in a cellar, in which half the bag-wigs and powdered heads in Bath were crowded. A classical piece was acted, in full costume of wigs and hoops, which did not strike the lookers-on as at all incongruous. Most of the gentlemen sat with their backs to the stage, and Dolly wondered what they came for. Then followed a piece which they found more amusing; Dolly was ashamed of detesting it as she did, when she saw the others laughing. There was a perpetual tumult in the footmen's gallery, and the customary showers of dry crusts, orange peel, and other missiles, descended on to the stage. A few years later these spoilt menials could be borne with no longer, and they were expelled from their free places in the theatres by general consent, with a riot which almost approached the O.P.'s in fury. Just as Lady Di and her party were seated, the Count made his appearance in a great passion. The men whom he had hired to convey him to the theatre had become insolent, demanding double fare for carrying a foreigner; and had opened the top of the sedan-chair, letting in the rain, which was falling heavily on his velvet coat and wig *à la mode*. 'Twas a scandal that the fellows should be allowed to treat a gentleman so, he swore; but he had no help but to pay the required sum. When his ruffled feelings were soothed, he took a chair next Dolly, which Camilla vacated in his favour, and set himself to the task of softening his "mistress' marble heart." To his murmured speeches Dolly lent her ear, but not her mind, for almost simultaneously with him had entered Sir Piers Ludlow, who took his seat behind a graceful masked figure, whom she identified as Mistress Belinda Sturges. From that moment she was absorbed in watching her graceless Prince Charming; and it was all one to her whether the play was the most attractive or the most uninteresting ever put upon the stage. To the eyes of Ludlow, however, she seemed intent upon the flatteries which the

Count was pouring into her ears, and he experienced a twinge of anger and jealousy. That he should forsake her was the one thing quite to be looked for and highly reasonable, but that she should encourage an insolent Frenchman was quite another affair, and he resolved to chastise the fellow at the earliest opportunity. Greatly to Dolly's annoyance, she found that M. de Bressy had the *entrée* to Lady Di's house at all times, and she was never free from his assiduities. But this was only one of many sources of trouble to her, and very soon she began heartily to wish herself back in the Abbey Litten. Every day she went to see her mother, and as she generally walked with Camilla or was attended by Sally, it was an opportunity not to be lost by the Count, whose tender interest in the health of Mr. Bellingham gave a favourable opinion of him to Mistress Dolly, though she wished she was not obliged to see so much of him. Much as she had visited at Lady Di's, she found it a very different thing being in the same house. She began to find out what sort of people she was amongst. Their "hearts had waxed gross." Riot and gambling, scheming, hating, wrangling, deceiving were rife amongst them. She was scared at the witty coarseness of conversation; at Cammy's hard grasping for money; and Lady Di's constant glasses of "cordial." She cried to see the despairing faces which went away from the card-tables, and trembled at the scoffs which proved such utter lack of reverence. Feeling all this deeply, added to the especial woe of seeing nothing of Ludlow, and staying awake at nights, perplexing herself with various solutions of his conduct, made Dolly so sad and pensive that Lady Di lost all patience with her. She ate so little that her hostess began to think she wanted to starve herself, and insisted that she should give up nibbling dry bread like a mouse on a fast-day, and eat something more sensible. She vowed that she was more thankful than ever for having no daughters of her own to plague her, and said it all came of Lady Chesney not having married the chit quietly off two years before. She had remarked that if girls were not married at fourteen or fifteen they always took some craze into their heads; an unmarried girl old enough to think for herself was the very mischief.

Ludlow passed his time between the Princess Amelia's and the Duchess of Kingston's houses; paying court to beautiful, capricious, sulky Mistress Sturges. He did not intend to drop Dolly altogether, but at present he found his hands rather full.

Madam Zinzan was much disturbed upon hearing that Dolly had

been sent to Lady Di Buckler's; it seemed an unfriendly act on the part of her old school-fellow, and she felt a kindly interest in the girl, whose face and manner she had thought very winning. She began to doubt the discretion of Lady Chesney, and to remember that her judgment had never been remarkably strong. In renewing her acquaintance, she had had some hopes that Dolly would prove suitable as a wife for her son Grenville. She was always seeking a wife for him, and had never yet succeeded. As a very young man, he had had the bitter disappointment of being jilted by a remarkably fascinating lady in the suite of the Princess Amelia, some years older than himself. With a not uncommon species of justice he had visited the lady's inconstancy upon her whole sex, and having avoided womankind, with the exception of his mother, from that time, had run no risk of the recurrence of a like misfortune. He fancied he thought scorn of them all, although he did not delight in railing against them; and, when an acquaintance married, he pitied the poor fellow, considering him in need of studying Skelton's sermon on "How to be happy, *though* married." He had now sat for some time as Member for Reading.

Madam Zinzan had bred up her younger son, Bernard, on the pattern of the friend of her youth, Bishop Ken, and he had fulfilled her dearest hopes. While "thistles and briars were springing up on the altars" of the land, he was one of the faithful unknown ten thousand who have not bent the knee to Baal. Young as he was, "his very smile was many a time praise, his silence a reproof, punishing the evil in a man's conscience." Madam Zinzan, straightforward, decided, capable woman that she was, who could twist her elder son round her finger, as she could the flax on her distaff, was Bernard's loving thrall. He had had his sorrow; his early love had died, and this, in addition to his sacred profession, his wonderful goodness, and his delicate health, set him quite apart from others in her fond eyes. She did not understand Grenville, but Bernard thought him the best of men and brothers, so she took him at his valuation. One day the three were walking in the old-fashioned garden of St. Ann's Court, and Madam had been relieving her mind by bemoaning the indiscretion of Lady Chesney in entrusting Lady Di Buckler with the charge of Dolly.

"'Tis the most rackety house in Bath, no doubt," said Zinzan, putting up his eyebrows with a philosophical air of being surprised at no rashness on the part of a woman.

"The young lady has a very sweet face, to my thinking," said Bernard, always ready to break a lance in honour of womanhood, "and speaks in a simple, pretty manner, which made me regret to see her among those silly people."

"Under the tutelage of Lady Di Buckler and Mistress Thresher she will very speedily get rid of her old-world simplicity, and be reformed as entirely as can be desired. You may thank Heaven, madam, that you have no daughters to worry you," said Zinzan.

"I thank Heaven daily for my two good sons," replied Madam Zinzan; "but I have no reason to think that, had Heaven been pleased to give me daughters, they would have turned out amiss."

"Ingrain in the present generation, you may depend. 'Tis a marvel to think what the next one will be; the world will be drowned in a deluge of folly," said Zinzan, half jestingly.

"Are you at all acquainted with Sir Piers Ludlow, my son? he is a young man of whom I have heard favourable mention."

"I have met him more than once, and have heard men speak of him, madam. I do not think you would desire his acquaintance."

"He is a fine man ruined," said Bernard. "The world has been too kind to him, and he is a rake and a gambler; one of those men born to fortune, who are a curse to the country, instead of its pride."

"You amaze me!" said Madam Zinzan. "It is impossible that Lady Chesney can understand his character; she talked with much elation of his becoming her son-in-law."

"'Twould be the worst thing that could befall Mistress Chesney," said Bernard. "I fear they have fallen blindfold into the worst set in Bath, and such a thing is to be expected."

"I doubt much if it will be," said Grenville. "Joliffe, who knows the fashionable world, as it calls itself, was telling me (though Heaven knows I did not wish to hear) that Ludlow is courting the heiress, Mistress Sturges, and that a rascally Frenchman is following Dolly, as the second heiress in Bath."

"Heiress to what, I should like to know?" said Madam Zinzan. "Spincourt is entailed, and her father had a very small fortune."

"Then monsieur will get his deserts," said Grenville. "He is robbing the *beaux* at the gaming-tables roundly, they say. See what it is to be in Bath! Gossip must be in the air!"

"I think one may gossip sometimes from good motives, Mr. Zinzan."

"That is a very demoralizing sentiment, madam," returned Grenville.

"I am greatly concerned for that poor young thing in the hands of Lady Diana Buckler, who struck me as the vulgarest woman of good birth I ever met," said Madam.

"I verily believe, madam, you would pardon wickedness sooner than vulgarity," said the incorrigible Grenville. "I attribute it to your charitably hoping for improvement in the one, and being aware that the other is beyond mending."

Madam, being excessively conscientious, was quite concerned at this opinion, but did not know how to refute it.

"We know 'manners mayketh the man,'" continued Zinzan, "so doubtless you have reason on your side."

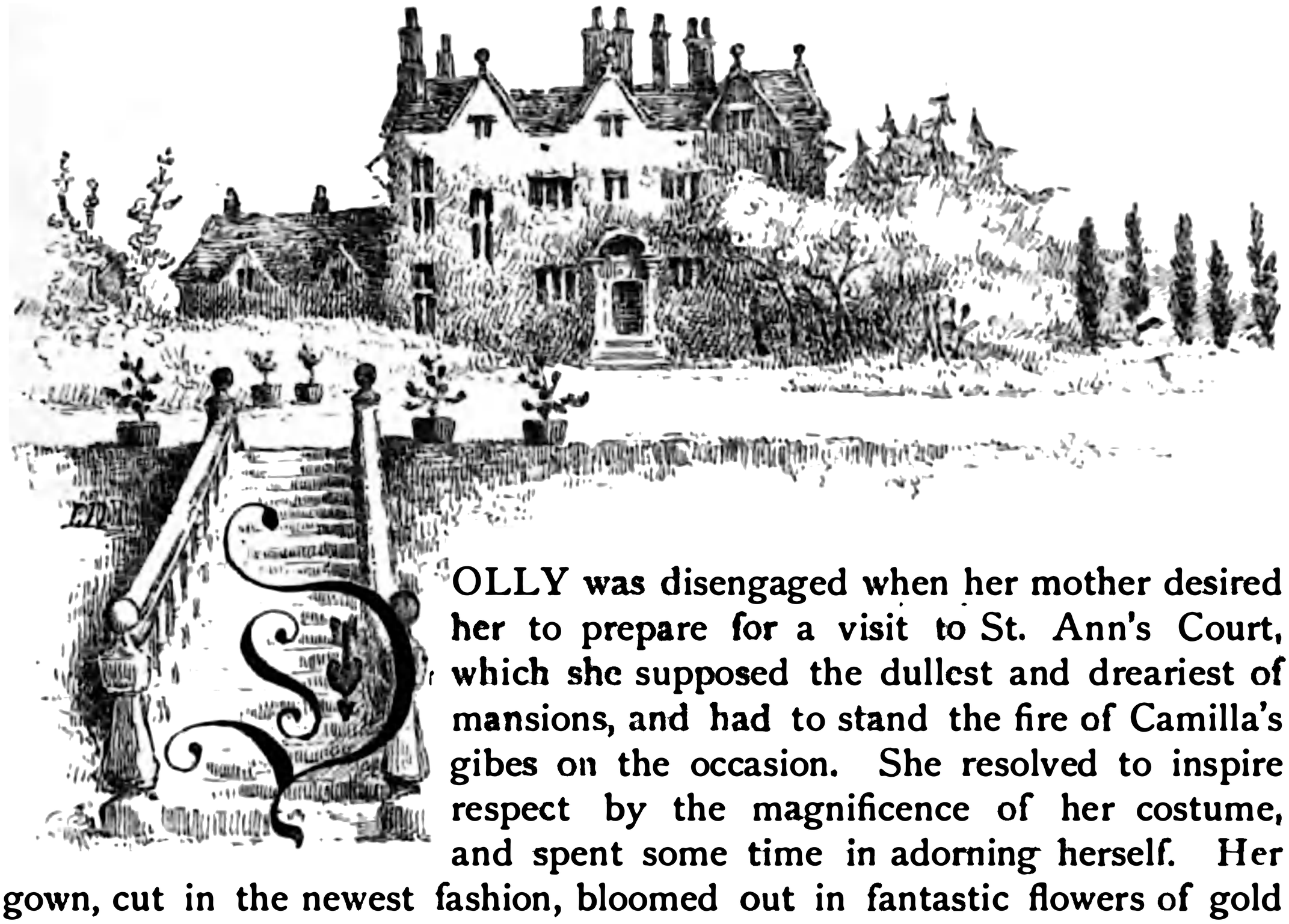
"When the great become vulgar," said Madam, "society, manners, and Christian courtesy decay; nay, a nation may be corrupted, so closely are manners and morals intertwined."

"But to return, madam; why do you not ask little Mistress Chesney to pass a day with you, and endeavour to influence her in opposition to Lady Di Buckler?" said Bernard.

Grenville objected on various scores to so superfluous a proceeding, but Madam was inclined to pay attention to the suggestion, and the result was a billet to Lady Chesney, requesting the honour of Mistress Dolly's company to dinner at an early date.

CHAPTER XI.

ST. ANN'S.



DOLLY was disengaged when her mother desired her to prepare for a visit to St. Ann's Court, which she supposed the dullest and dreariest of mansions, and had to stand the fire of Camilla's gibes on the occasion. She resolved to inspire respect by the magnificence of her costume, and spent some time in adorning herself. Her gown, cut in the newest fashion, bloomed out in fantastic flowers of gold and silver, and on her head was perched a grotesque species of gauze butterfly, set thick with spangles. In all the stiffness of her finery she was conveyed in her sedan to St. Ann's Court, a gray gabled house, with casement windows, and a large garden behind, surrounded by trees. Madam Zinzan greeted her kindly, and the two sat in her parlour, with their tapestry work in their hands, for some conversation against the hour of dinner. But, alas! for Dolly's fine feathers. Madam's inward comment had been—"Bless me, what a vain, dressed-out child!" and when she put on her gold-rimmed spectacles she perceived that she had a duty to perform by her.

"You have a vastly fine gown on, and you are a pretty little maiden, my dear Miss Dolly," she said; "but pray are modesty bibs no longer the mode?"

Dolly blushed.

"I've a tucker, madam, which I suppose is the same thing," she said. "I put on my bodice just as the mantua-maker sent it home."

"I should advise you, my love, not to depend upon milliners and mantua-makers for the propriety becoming a young gentlewoman of quality, and I shall do for you what I would do for a daughter of my own."

So saying, she rang a hand-bell, and a sober waiting-woman appeared.

"Betty, fetch me a lace kerchief," said madam, "I fear lest Mistress Dolly should take a chill."

The kerchief was brought, and tied in a somewhat grim manner over Dolly's shoulders and under her arms. When this little incident was over, the conversation went on pleasantly, for Madam did not intend Dolly to think her harsh.

Mr. Zinzan and his brother came in to the one o'clock dinner, and Dolly found it less formidable than she had expected. Madam took the head of the table in her stately fashion, and had her sleeves pinned back by the butler preparatory to carving. Dolly could not help being interested in her conversation; she had anecdotes of Marlborough, Walpole, and the fascinating "trimmer," Halifax, to whose memory she gave a sigh; and many other persons of note with whom she had mingled. With Zinzan she talked the politics of the day; and Dolly reflected with some discomfort upon the contrast between this dinner-table talk and that which she heard daily in Kingsmead Square. She had imagined that she was going to look down upon the young parson, for besides being influenced by the sneers of Ludlow and Cammy upon this particular one, she had hitherto known only two kinds of clergymen. The amiable old rector of Spincourt was one; he never allowed himself to be put out on any emergency, and in church and out he seemed in a perpetual doze, though he was unquestionably "better in the bottle than in the wood." He was accustomed to send up to the house on a Sunday morning to know if it was Mr. Bellingham's pleasure that divine service should be performed; and it was his fashion to baptize his young parishioners in a batch, when there were enough to make it worth his while, and one of the parents happened to be a farmer, who chose to make a feast and produce

his best punch-bowl for the occasion. The other species were those she had met in Bath, who did their best to conceal their profession, and succeeded in disgracing it. They swore and gambled, and spent their time in idling about places of amusement, and flattering their patrons. The only one admitted to Lady Di's house was an archdeacon, who was considered to possess a unique recipe for green tea punch, and who sold wine, and was a capital judge of it. But Bernard Zinzan, who seemed to consider his the noblest profession a man could have, and spoke like a scholar and a gentleman, and entertained her with kind courtesy, was a new experience to Dolly. Mr. Zinzan seemed to think that so long as she had enough to eat, and had taken wine formally with him, she required no more attention, so she soon made up her mind that she preferred the young parson, in spite of his black coat, to his elder brother. Having sat the proper time at the dinner-table, the two ladies returned to their work in the parlour, and were left by themselves for some time. Dolly thought this dull, and wished Mr. Bernard would leave his brother, and come and talk to them. Madam's heart warmed towards her little guest, and she glided at once into her favourite topic—the excellences of her two sons. Dolly, thinking herself very wise, asked if it was not a pity that Mr. Bernard had not got a chaplaincy in some nobleman's family.

"No, my dear Miss Dolly," answered her hostess; "Bernard would cling to the skirt of no patron; he was offered a scarf and refused it.

> "'He seeks not a convenience, but a cure;
> Would rather souls than his own gain ensure,'

as my beloved friend, Bishop Ken, hath it. He stints himself greatly in his younger son's portion, that he may have the more to bestow, for there is wretchedness in this gay city you little wot of, Mistress Dolly. He is my son Grenville's almoner too; to what extent I know not, but I have heard him say that his poor (alas! how seldom do we hear a clergyman talk of his poor) would fare ill if it were not for Grenville. They are at present deeply interested in a plan for an hospital. Mr. Nash and Grenville arranged it, and my sons cover sheets of paper with designs and estimates. I trust it may prosper. Mr. Nash will be better remembered as the founder of an hospital than as master of the ceremonies."

Dolly coloured with shame as she remembered having accused Mr.

Zinzan of miserliness because he had not put a guinea or two in Nash's hat at the pump-house.

"Mr. Zinzan does not appear to join in any amusements, madam," she suggested, timidly.

"For dancing he has no inclination, though it was not always so; but his parliamentary duties take up a great part of his time, and for recreation he prefers taking out his horse or gun. He never touches a card, for his esteemed father made him swear, when he was a child of the tender age of nine, that he would eschew gambling in every form. That oath he has kept to the letter through all the temptations, and even persecutions, of school and college, and men, whose approval is worth having, honour him for it, though it gains him no friends in a place like this."

Dolly felt quite bewildered, and had a hazy idea that Mr. Zinzan had been slandered among her friends; she thought it might be possible to esteem and respect him, but his were the virtues of sombre middle age (he was one-and-thirty), and for a hero of romance, a being to be adored, Piers Ludlow, brilliant and splendid, flashed before her mind's eye. It was a beautiful autumn day; the sun was pouring in through the closed windows and red curtains, though it was early in October; the room was becoming more and more close; Dolly's head felt like a ball of lead; she was sticking her needle into her bit of embroidery quite at random; her eyelids kept dropping; Madam Zinzan's voice grew humming and indistinct; she thought she heard Mr. Walpole's name, but was not sure; she leant stealthily back in her high carved chair; even the parrot in the corner dropped the argumentative conversation it had been holding with itself, and fell into a lazy, snappish mumble. The blue sky behind the lattice looked like Miss Sturges' balefully beautiful eyes. How much pleasanter it would be to sit under the trees in the garden than the low, painted ceiling, which seemed pressing down its scrolls and garlands upon her head! How pretty Spincourt must be looking in autumn russet! There was the thatched lodge, and there were the spreading trees; a rabbit scudding through the bracken with its bit of a tail cocked up; a pheasant starting in the coppice with a whirr; the distant sound of a gun; the leaves all tumbling down about the handsome old iron gates, with the Bellingham arms and motto woven in them. Now the gates swing back—they are rusty, and make a pleasant little creaking—and up the road, bestrewn with burnished beech leaves, comes a firm step she knows well.

Piers Ludlow in amaranth velvet, with a gun on his shoulder, is approaching. No; on nearer sight, it is Mr. Bernard Zinzan, with Dr. Smith's peeled willow wand in his hand; or is it grave Grenville dragging Count de Bressy in a dog-leash? The red beech leaves melt together into a polished oak floor, and across it steals Queen Eleanor with the bowl of poison and uplifted dagger; when, lo! she changes into Camilla Thresher with a dish of chocolate and a fan!—and with a sudden start Mistress Chesney wakes up and finds, to her consternation, that she has been asleep and dreaming, while Madam is dilating upon the merits of her sons and the witty sayings of Mr. Walpole. Mr. Bernard Zinzan stands before her with a twinkle in his gray eyes.

"We will not tell," he said, in a low voice; "I ask your pardon for disturbing pleasant dreams. Madam," he continued, turning to his mother, "this room is very warm; will you not take your coffee in the garden? Grenville is spreading cushions on the rustic seat."

The garden of St. Ann's Court was still gay with flowers; hollyhocks and lavender bloomed on either side of the long walks, and rows of arbor vitæ showed dark against emerald turf. There was a stone fountain, guarded by yew peacocks; and in the centre of a plot of grass stood a gray old sun-dial, up which crept spear-leaved ivy, and on whose worn face was the motto, in antique brass letters, "The Night cometh." Arching over all was the blue sky, bluer and more tender than Mistress Sturges' beautiful eyes; and Dolly felt that the turmoil of pleasure-seeking was shut outside, and that this was peace. She wished herself in one of her comfortable white dimity gowns again, and thought how out of place Lady Di and Camilla would be in this garden.

Before the brothers came out, Bernard had said to Grenville, "Gren, I cannot stay long, and I am concerned lest you and your civility should take flight together. Try and entertain this little girl for once, though you have forsworn the sex."

"I will, to please you; but what a fantastically attired damsel it is, fresh from the clutches of Lady Di."

"Look at her gentle face, O woman-hater! and not at the tawdry with which it has pleased her to bedeck herself."

"Very fit, too, for the wife of that jackanapes, Ludlow. They had better have given her to some honest Hampshire squire, who can take a turn at his own plough."

"A bad man! I trust there is as little truth in the report as in most reports. I would to Heaven the little lass had fallen into better hands, and that you might wed her yourself, my old boy!"

To which Grenville replied curtly, "A wise old saw says, 'Once bitten, twice shy,'" and changed the subject.

But his brother's remonstrance produced the desired effect of making him more agreeable to Mistress Chesney. When they had taken their coffee, Madam sent the three to walk round the garden, and they had a very pleasant stroll together. Standing by the sun-dial, Dolly traced out the motto with her finger, and said—

"That is just the way with these gloomy old sun-dials, for ever putting one in mind of something disagreeable. Of course the night cometh, but we need not make ourselves melancholy about it beforehand."

"It comes, nevertheless," said Grenville, dryly.

"I would have some cheerful, sprightly motto," said Dolly.

"Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," said Bernard, with his eyes fixed on the shadow of the gnomon, but his thoughts further away.

"The legend for every door in Bath, it would seem," said Grenville. "Laugh, and be merry, and fling the crumbs to Lazarus, with our eyes shut, lest we should shock them."

Dolly looked at him in surprised alarm.

"'Tis the old story of idleness and fulness of bread," said Bernard, sadly. "Kind-hearted selfishness is a gate that turns both ways, shut first upon others, and then upon ourselves."

"But," cried Dolly, anxiously, "you ought surely to remember that the people here are making holiday!"

"And if they do it for one or two months in the year, and neither injure themselves or their neighbours, I would be the first to bid God-speed to them. But if 'tis self, worshipped in market-place and drawing-room, gambling-house and assembly—year in and year out—from place to place, from city to city—these folks must have found some way to stifle conscience; I do not know what it is, I cannot! And now I must bid you farewell, but do not forget the grim old sun-dial. I am sure you think it well that, while you are bid rejoice in your youth, you are also reminded that ere very long the bowl will be broken at the fountain, the silver cord loosed. None would bid you be sad, only wise in time. There, you see, I am at my trade; preaching you a sermon, Miss Dolly,

when I ought to be going about my business. For the present, farewell, once more; we shall meet, I trust, at Madam's tea-table."

Dolly followed Bernard with her eyes as he walked rapidly away. "Your brother seems very happy," she said, "withal he is so good."

"He is the joyfullest man I know," answered Zinzan, with one of those smiles she did not understand. She was surprised that she was not too timid to talk to the formidable Mr. Zinzan when they were left alone; and he allowed to himself that she had not yet lost the simplicity and freshness of nature. The little airs and graces she had acquired rather amused him, for there was so much that was childish still about her, though she would fain be considered a finished fine lady.

"Sir," she said, presently, "I know you are mighty clever, and have a seat in Parliament, and read big books, for Madam told me so; pray will you tell me what you think of fortune-telling?"

"That means, I conclude, that you have been persuaded to have your fortune told by the quack, Dr. Smith, Mistress Dolly."

"Indeed, he is a most wonderful man; he reads fate by the stars, and knows precisely what will happen. Some of his prophecies have come true already," she added, lowering her voice.

"Then, of course, I have not a word to say. It would vex you to hear that the greatest magic I know of with these wizards is performed more simply than through the stars, merely with the touch of a bit of gold, or even silver. And if they know a little beforehand of their visitors, 'tis observed they make shrewd casts into the future."

"Dr. Smith could have known nothing about me," said Dolly, confidently, never suspecting that Camilla's interview with the wizard might have explained his strange acquaintance with her circumstances. "You have consulted them yourself, sir, since you know all about it."

"You have me there," said Zinzan, laughing. "I must either confess to having been a dupe, or stand convicted of talking about what I know nothing of. Nevertheless, if you will take my advice, which of course you will not, you will have nothing more to do with these accomplished gentlemen; and do not let Dr. Smith's fortune-telling disturb your mind."

Dolly sighed. "What would you have me do, when what he foretells is most terrible, and is beginning to come to pass? Oh, Mr. Zinzan, pray tell me, 'tis not absolutely certain that all he foretold will come to pass, surely? 'twould kill me!"

When Zinzan saw how seriously she took it he became grave.

"If these men really possess the power to which they pretend, why have they not raised themselves to greatness and power? Where would their powers be limited, and who should cope with them? And yet they have always been obscure. Can you suppose these ignorant, unscrupulous men to be gifted with wisdom which was denied to David, Solomon, Job, St. Paul, besides the wise Pagans of old, and the great of all ages? And I could easier suppose them capable of reading the fate of nations than of individuals. True, every reader of the classics knows that there was such a thing as magic in times before the Christian era, resulting doubtless in a traffic with the spirit of evil, which has not been permitted since—at least in Christian countries. I have fancied that the gipsies, who are the descendants of we know not what heathen tribes, retain the traditions of their ancestors, and have besides a marvellous aptitude for reading character, and quickness of observation. But I do assure you, Mistress Dolly, that your Dr. Smith is no better than a gross impostor worthy of the stocks; and if he has hit upon any truths with you, you may be confident that he knew enough about you beforehand for his purpose."

"I thank you, sir," said Dolly, "and I think I feel easier in my mind."

In the short pause which followed, a toad came slowly hopping up the path, and Dolly bent down to watch it.

"Why, you are not quite a lady *à la mode* after all," said Zinzan. "You ought to swoon at the sight of the ugly creature, and beseech me to kill it."

"I like the strange, wrinkled thing with its shining eyes, and I have seen too many about Spincourt to fear them. I scarcely believe they spit poison either, because I have taken them in my hand when I was a child, and got no harm."

"I do not believe it either. I wonder if you are singular in any other respects. You play cards, of course?"

"Yes; but without any luck, whatever the game, and no matter where I sit; I scarcely ever win even a raffle."

"Do you go to soak in a powdered head and ribbons in the Cross Bath every morning? I hear 'tis patronized by royalty."

"No; my mamma does not wish it, and I think it mighty disagreeable."

"I am glad you will not be of the number of fine ladies killed by it every year. I cannot help thinking that you are still behind the fashion

in many instances. Among others, you have not learnt that good breeding teaches the tongue to falsify the heart."

"I trust I never shall; and indeed, sir, I see many things I dislike very much, and could never join in, in the fashionable world."

"Then escape from it as soon as possible, Miss Dolly; believe me, you would be happier at Spincourt."

"Sir," said poor Dolly, "I have many a time wished I had never left it."

They then rejoined Madam Zinzan, who fell into a pleasant chat over old friends of the two families, calling upon Dolly to remember people who were dead before she was born. At length Piers Ludlow was mentioned, and Zinzan saw Dolly's countenance change. He walked away marvelling that women were always to be caught by a gaudy bait; and strolled about the garden musing over what Madam had said concerning Ludlow, and his friend Joliffe had told him about the Count. After a time he went to seek an October peach, and brought the last of the year to Mistress Dolly, cradled upon a cabbage leaf. From the depths of a capacious pocket Madam produced a little silver fruit-knife, and Dolly peeled the peach, and divided it impartially into three. But Zinzan could not be induced to take his portion, until, as Dolly was very urgent, he took the stone for his share, and said he would plant it, and that she should have a peach tree of her own to take to Spincourt.

"You would like a posy," Mr. Zinzan suggested presently.

Dolly assented, and Madam stared at him, almost unable to believe her ears. If after all he should fancy this damsel, who was, according to her mother's account, promised to another man, what a misfortune it would be! While Zinzan was gathering stocks, marigolds, sweet-williams, and carnations, he was thinking of his false love; he did not know why, he had not thought of her for some time. The posy was built up with southernwood and rosemary, and put into Dolly's hands; she thought it delicious, for it was the first she had seen gathered since she left Hampshire.

At the tea-table, glimmering pleasantly with old plate and china, they were joined by Bernard. Dolly was well pleased to see him again, and felt quite happy under the influence of his bright, genial nature. He heaped her plate with hot cakes, and fruit, and cream, and the home-made dainties of which Madam had brought great store from Berkshire. After

tea they sat in the dim light of wax candles, upon chairs worked with parterres of flowers by Madam's own hand, and Dolly sang ballads to them in a sweet, true voice, which pleased them all extremely. And when the day was over, and Dolly jogged home in her sedan, she confessed to herself that it had been not only endurable, but very pleasant; and registered a vow never to laugh at the Zinzans again.

CHAPTER XII.

A ROW BY MOONLIGHT.

CAPTAIN JOLIFFE, of the 15th Light Dragoons, was one of the few friends Zinzan had in Bath. He was a man of a quiet, speculative turn of mind, more resembling a philosopher than a dashing cavalry officer. His chief pleasure lay in reading, and his greatest amusement in society was observing other people. As his stay in Bath was short, and he was parted from his favourite companions—books—he spent some of his time in making acquaintance with the entertainments the place afforded, and attained a certain popularity of his own, though he was generally called "an odd sort of fellow." One day he persuaded Zinzan to take a stroll on St. Mary's Ramparts while the band was playing.

"You permit the follies of society to vex you," he said, as they promenaded among flocks of Lady Dis and Camillas. "Now they entertain me. If you do away with them by Act of Parliament, I shall be a loser."

"In the same way, bad music distracts you, while I can endure a succession of wrong chords with great resignation," answered Zinzan. "Therefore you show wisdom in shunning what annoys your ear, and I in avoiding what offends my mind. Now, for what have you brought me here? To look at the sunset, and think of a Claude? I can see it better when I am riding. To admire the belles? I have not eyes that can pierce the disguise of rouge, powder, and paint, or doubtless I should do homage to their beauty."

"You are a crabbed fellow! I have brought you hither to study men, women, and manners—bad manners, chiefly, I'll allow; and possibly bad men and women too; but none the less interesting on that account to a philosopher. See yonder a brilliant specimen—the greatest rogue in Bath, if one may trust appearances; if not, the best imitation of one. I am not sorry to add that he is a foreigner, and a Frenchman to boot."

He indicated M. de Bressy as he spoke, who, to Zinzan's concern and perhaps disgust, was walking with Dolly.

"'Tis a scandal that he should be the companion of young and virtuous women!" he exclaimed.

"They like it, my friend. He is interesting; he is unfortunate; he sugars the plums of his speech largely. He has seen the world and had a life of adventure—has doubtless escaped many a hanging. They must have their monsters in flesh and blood, as well as in china-ware."

Zinzan watched the pair angrily; presently they crossed the ferry with two or three others, and sauntered about the meadows.

"The young lady is reported an heiress," said Joliffe; "and our friend, the count, is hot in pursuit—may he break his neck over a fence. The damsel seems to have no friends; 'tis a pity, for she is young."

"Rumour gave her to the man they call Handsome Ludlow," said Zinzan. "There appears little to choose between the two suitors."

"Ludlow is not so thorough-paced a villain as the count. He has a species of honour which is, I presume, bred in the bone of a well-born Englishman. The Frenchman is a man to give a stab in the back."

"You were mistaken in supposing Mistress Chesney has no friends," said Zinzan; "but unhappily her friends are powerless in this matter. Yet I will do what a man may, to set her on her guard against this fellow."

"The attempt would be well made; as for Ludlow, I fancy he flies at higher game; but I am mistaken if he bring it down. I have good reason for thinking he is tired of playing the humble servant to Mistress Chesney; and her fortune would be but a capful to him."

"Lady Di Buckler has her in her house, so will do what she pleases with the girl; 'tis monstrous folly to permit it!"

"On my conscience, the young lady has fallen among thieves! You may rely upon me, if you think of any way to serve her."

"My mother is interested in her, otherwise 'tis no concern of mine," said Zinzan, hastily.

"I would willingly make it mine, in order to put a spoke in monsieur's wheel," returned Joliffe.

Zinzan lingered upon the terrace in hopes of an opportunity of warning Dolly of the danger to which she exposed herself by placing confidence in the count; but his intentions were defeated by M. de Bressy remaining with her as long as she stayed, and escorting her back to Kingsmead Square. Zinzan went home disappointed, and talked the matter over with Bernard, surprised to find how much interest he felt in the matter.

One of the entertainments of this week was a small *fête* at a house on the river bank. The gardens, which sloped to the water's edge, were illuminated with oil lamps, and at intervals all the evening, the music of a concealed band enticed the guests outside the house. Lady Di, the Duchess of Kingston, and their respective parties were there; and, of course, Sir Piers Ludlow, as usual remarkable among the other men for his personal beauty and rich dress. Miss Sturges, beautiful, sulky, and dressed like a princess, was the centre of a group of butterfly adorers, whom she treated with the utmost haughtiness. Poor Dolly, who was sick for want of a smile from Piers, saw him flush and bite his lips when one of Mistress Belinda's insolent remarks was addressed to him. She went into the garden reluctantly enough with M. de Bressy; but she felt as though it mattered little what she did or where she went. Presently they passed Ludlow with the fair Belinda; his bow was cold and stiff, and for the first time Dolly felt a spark of resentment. Mistress Sturges, soon wearying both of the open air and her companion, threw off the latter and re-entered the saloon. Scarcely had her train swept in at the door, than out glided Camilla; a pale creature, with dark glittering eyes and tight lips.

"What, alone?" she said to Ludlow, in an unusually mild voice. "Are you minded to walk in the maze?"

"'Twould not be the first time with you, Cammy," he answered quickly.

"'Tis weary work straying about a maze for years," she murmured.

He affected not to hear, and hummed the tune the band was playing.

"I would ask a question, Ludlow," said Camilla, slowly.

"Pray do so."

"Are you going to wed Mistress Sturges?"

She fixed her dark eyes intently on him as she spoke. Ludlow feigned a laugh.

"'Tis scarce a fair question before I have given the lady a chance of ruling my fate."

"You are right not to be too confident; there may yet be a slip 'twixt cup and lip," returned Camilla, in her usual sharp tones.

"I shall suppose you are bent upon contriving one," said Ludlow, lightly.

"You need not suspect me; I should scorn to be an enemy to Mistress Sturges."

"Pooh! Cammy, I did but jest. What has put into your head to talk of that dismalest of comedies, matrimony? You know well enough that only desperation would drive me to it; so no more of the pretty cross-patch, but let us talk of the old days when you and I enjoyed life more than we do now."

"'Twas short enjoyment enough for me, thanks to you."

"Nay, but you were never cross to me then."

"And I thought differently of you; and yet—to forget is so impossible—ah! you *have* forgotten all about those days; 'tis hard! Did you ever wonder why I did not marry?"

"'Tis impossible to weigh the caprice of women, though I esteemed you the most reasonable woman I ever met. I supposed that, like myself, you were waiting for sufficient gilding to your fetters."

"We did not think of such things once."

"On my conscience that comes strangely from you, Cammy! but I believe we were not so wise as we are now, so perhaps 'tis best to forget it all. Ha! there is little Dolly with that villain De Bressy. I'll have the scoundrel at my rapier point before long!"

"What, still hankering after that chit?" said Camilla bitterly.

"I did not think the little minx had forgotten me so easily. I did not reckon on her being so well learned in the ways of the world, as to toss me aside, as she would a cap for her hair, for one of newer mode!"

"Such a little simpleton is pleased with whoever pays court to her."

"Well, 'tis no bad thing. On my honour it did not please me to see her pine. Had she Mistress Sturges' fortune 'twould suit me well."

Camilla clenched the hand with which she had been plucking the leaves, as she brushed by them. Ludlow yawned. With a strong effort she subdued her temper, and set herself to talk in her usual sprightly manner. She knew that her strongest power lay in being able to amuse

him; and this power she now exerted, though she was secretly writhing under the sting of having been once more baffled in her long-cherished purpose.

Ludlow was now determined to see Dolly apart, and to find out if he had really lost his hold over her. An opportunity soon presented itself; he brought Camilla in from the garden as soon as possible, and a little while after she went up to Dolly, and said, "My love, have you had any refreshment? There is such a crowd in t'other room, I could scarce get at a dish of tea."

Ludlow stepped forward and offered his hand to Dolly.

"If you will come with me, Mistress Chesney, I think we may be successful."

Dolly had not the heart to refuse, though she went with a constrained manner and grave face. She knew she had a right to be displeased with him, and tried to appear as cold as she thought she ought.

"'Tis an unreasonable time since you and I were together, Mistress Dolly," began Ludlow.

"That is no fault of mine, sir," she answered stiffly.

"*L'Allegro* is become *il Penseroso;* how is that?" he said.

"Perhaps I have grown more discreet."

"Nay, I trust not. The last time I had the honour of being in your company, you gave me a rosebud. I see you have a posy in your hand; will you give me a flower from it, in token of goodwill?"

"Nay, sir, gifts are ill bestowed where they are not valued."

"I begin to see how it is!

"'Let dirge be sung and trentals rightly said,
For love is dead.
All love is dead, infected
With plague of deep disdain,
Worth, as nought worth rejected,
And faith fair, scorn doth gain.'"

"Alas 'faith fair!'" repeated Dolly. "Little of that in truth!"

"'Tis indeed nothing but a pretty conceit of the poets," said Ludlow with assumed indifference.

"I think, sir, that unless you get me my dish of tea speedily, some lady, Mistress Sturges perhaps, may think you long agone."

"I thank you, madam, for the hint. I promised to attend Mistress Sturges to her chair, for she leaves early."

"Why should we linger when 'tis merely irksome?" said Dolly.

"I see I was unmannerly in offering my escort. I should have left that to M. de Bressy. I am aware that a foreigner is usually preferred to a lady's own countryman. We Englishmen are doubtless rude compared to the elegance of a French count."

"Pray take me back at once! I would not on any account cause a moment's inconvenience to Mistress Sturges! Nay, I will not trouble you—here is Count de Bressy. Sir, will you have the goodness to relieve this gentleman of the charge of me?" And foolish Mistress Dolly, with her eyes flashing, and her lips quivering with excited and wounded feeling, darted towards M. de Bressy, who came in looking like Mephistopheles.

"Take me into the garden, sir, I am suffocating for air!" Dolly cried. "Where is my fan? This crowd is insufferable. I cannot open my pouncet-box—what has come to it?"

The count was very attentive, and full of concern, for what he called the "sudden distemper" of Mistress Dolly. She asked Camilla to join them, as they passed her. She saw at once that there had been some passage of arms between Prince Charming and Dolly, and under the impression that whatever it was it was probably in her favour, she followed the pair, eager to ascertain what had really happened. They walked down to the edge of the river. The dark water was flowing under a double firmament of stars—the solemn constellations of heaven, and little coloured twinkling lamp stars dotted about in a tiny fleet of rowing boats.

Captain Joliffe was, as became a philosopher, also a fisherman; and when he could not practise his skill with his rod, he was still fond of spending his time "where lucid Avon strayed"; and this evening, having been rowing about, and attracted by the sounds of music, he had moored his boat alongside the garden water-steps, and was enjoying the sweet strains coming from their hidden source, and the soothing influence of the "cherub contemplation." Naturally on such an occasion he had exchanged his smart light-blue regimentals for a suitable garb; and considering how rarely the gentlemen of that day appeared in "mufti," it was no wonder that M. de Bressy should have made the mistake of supposing him to be an ordinary waterman.

"'Tis a night to inspire a clod with the rosy flame of Cupid," exclaimed the count. "Shall we do ourselves the felicity of a float in this skiff, fair ladies? See, a boatman waits to pull the oar."

"Charming notion," cried Cammy; "'twould be purely delightful. What say you, Miss Dolly?"

"Ah! what says the charming Me-es Dollie?"

"As you please," said Dolly, recklessly.

"Then we go." And M. de Bressy hailed the listless light dragoon.

When Joliffe heard himself desired to draw up closer to the steps for a fare, he paused for a moment's reflection, then, recognizing the three, he obeyed, and allowed them to take their seats, pulling his cap low over his eyes. He did not suspect the count of evil devices at that moment, but since his stroll on St. Mary's Ramparts with Zinzan, he had taken an interest in Mistress Dolly, and had some desire to know her real position with regard to the count. He soon perceived that the Frenchman was very earnestly paying court to Dolly, and that she took small interest in him, but appeared absorbed in sorrowful meditations. The wily Camilla was full of her own schemes, so the count's voice was almost the only one heard as they glided past the lights of the town, and under the old bridge. M. de Bressy chose to go that way for reasons which he presently communicated to Mistress Thresher in French, while Dolly, who had but a smattering of the language, and was not attending, leant over the side of the boat, absently watching the rippling path of moonlight which fled before them. Joliffe was a good French linguist, and could not, if he would, avoid hearing all that passed.

"Fortune has tossed the ball of opportunity into my hands," said the count, "and it shall not lie idle. Oblige your devoted servant, dear madam, by insisting upon landing. My coach can soon be procured, and then London lies before us."

"And the Fleet?" said Camilla.

"The Fleet! ah, true, I remember all in which you instructed me concerning the admirable simplicity of that arrangement—that brief ceremony which is as binding as the Pope himself could make it. My servant shall attend you, dear madam, back to your friends, and I shall be eternally indebted to you."

Camilla gave an assenting nod; a Fleet marriage would indeed put an efficient barrier between Dolly and Sir Piers.

"My love," said the traitress, "do you not feel some alarm at being on the water so late? I vow I am in a tremor for fear of being upset; I think we were indiscreet in venturing. Count, pray be so good as to land us instantly, and we can return by a hackney."

"Sure, Miss Cammy, as we are so far, we had best remain in the boat," said Dolly.

"Not a moment longer!" cried Camilla, affecting increased terror, "Order this man to row to shore instantly, sir, I beseech you."

"I hasten to obey," answered the count, and gave the order.

Joliffe pulled round, and they slid into the mud bank at a rough landing-place. The ladies were helped ashore, and M. de Bressy stepped back to pay their boatman. Joliffe was standing up, apparently busy with the oars, one of which, with the utmost apparent carelessness, he had got entangled in a low ragged bush. As the count put one foot on the boat it slipped away under him, and in a moment he found himself, velvet coat, powdered wig, and all, plunged into an extremely cold bath, with the additional discomfiture of being unable to swim. Camilla and Dolly screamed, and two or three lookers-on collected on the bank. When Joliffe, who was a perfect swimmer, considered the dandy Frenchman had endured sufficient misery, he stretched out an oar, at which he frantically grasped, and taking him by the collar, drew him into the boat, just as the men on the bank were beginning to consider whether or not they should render any assistance. To the most responsible-looking of these Joliffe handed the exhausted and terrified count, with a guinea, and an injunction that he should be conveyed to his lodgings in the Orange Grove at once. He then called a hackney coach, into which he put Mistress Thresher and Dolly; and mounting on the box, he took the reins from the driver, and took them back to the house of their friends as quickly as possible.

"Say nothing about this piece of folly," said Camilla; but Dolly declined to make a secret of it, and gave Lady Di, as she imagined, a true history of the adventure.

They found her just thinking of leaving, and wondering what had become of them. Joliffe returned home with the conscious satisfaction of having done a good action, and spent a very agreeable evening. Two days passed without his being able to see Zinzan, to whom he was eager to describe how he had outwitted the count.

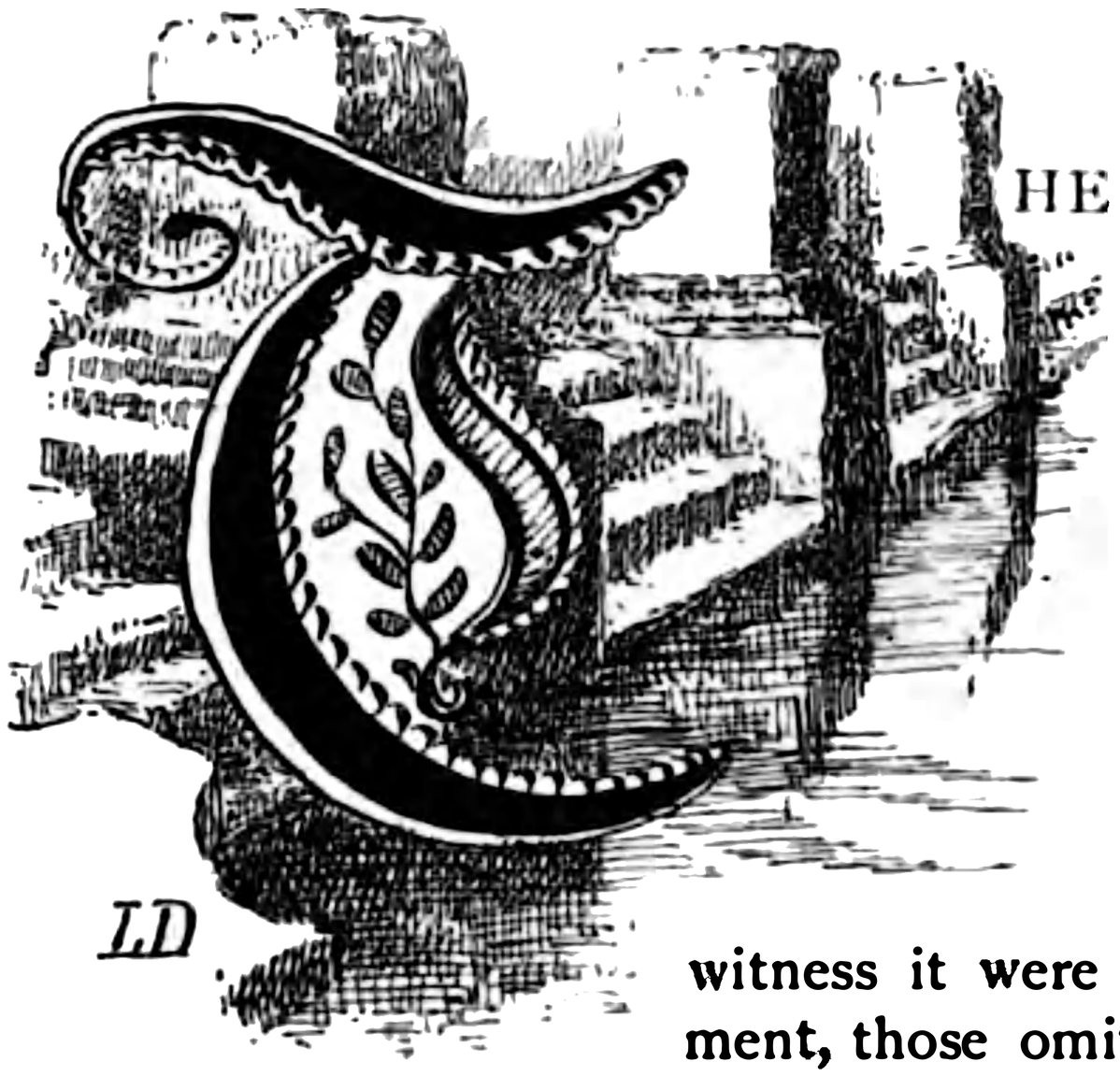
During those same two days Dolly experienced a change in Mistress Thresher's behaviour to her. She ceased to be affectionate, and took every opportunity of saying cutting things. A covert sneer seemed to lurk in every sentence she addressed to her. Dolly had, fortunately, little of her company, as she avoided her as much as she could, being in the same house; but Mistress Thresher always had some good reason why, when she went out, Dolly should not go too; and the door between their rooms was kept locked. M. de Bressy did not become equally distant; he persecuted Dolly with more unremitting attentions than ever, after the singular "accident" which had put a stop to his plan for running off with her. Perhaps she knew that she had behaved foolishly, or perhaps it was only because of her quarrel with Ludlow, but certainly at this time the count's assiduities became unbearable to her. No hour of the day was safe from his visits; Sally took to chattering incessantly about him; the barber who came daily to dress her hair sang his praises; and as the count, in accordance with the fashion of the day, thought no wooing could be successful without much tagging of rhymes, he used to send an unremitting supply of bad verses in shocking English. His marble-hearted mistress tore them from their wrappers with beating heart, hoping, with an ever fainter hope, to find some token of reconciliation from her graceless Piers. With these appeals to her compassion, came posies, and trinkets, and true-love knots, until at length, becoming desperate, Dolly gathered them all up, and laid them in a heap before Lady Di, imploring her to put a stop to the persecution.

"Lack-a-day!" cried Lady Di, laughing, "what is all this to-do about? I know the man is looking out for an heiress. I'll be sworn, Mistress Dolly, some one has told him you are one! I'll settle the matter in a trice by telling him Spincourt is entailed, and that you won't have a groat if you marry without your mamma's consent. Bless me, I never thought you objected, and I always leave girls to manage their own nonsense without my meddling."

However, in spite of this promise of interference, Dolly's petition slipped out of Lady Di's head for the present, so no good came of it.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE POSIE.



celebrated *Beggar's Opera*, after having made "Gay rich, and Rich gay," obtained a wide-spread popularity over the country, amateurs took it up, and children especially were taught to act it. It was to be played at the Princess Amelia's house at Bath, Miss Biddy Trulow being among the actors. Those invited to hear and witness it were in great expectation of enjoyment, those omitted were in despair. For days the question certain to be asked was, "Are you invited to the princess's play?" Lady Di trembled for a week, and then a card came to make her happy. Even Madam Zinzan resolved to go, and Grenville was not unwilling to escort her. Captain Joliffe, who cared nothing for the honour of the thing, went, because he had not been able to see Zinzan since the affair of the boat, and he was anxious to consult him about it. He had tried to philosophize over the matter, and persuade himself that it was no concern of his; that Mistress Chesney had a mother and uncle to take care of her; that a girl under the tutelage of Lady Di Buckler was not worth any trouble; that, as a stranger to the Chesneys, his interference was absurd; that there was no especial feeling of friendship in the matter, she was not betrothed to Zinzan, and would probably marry Ludlow

if she should have the happiness to escape the count ; but in spite of so many good reasons to the contrary, he persisted in taking an unwonted interest in Dolly's fortunes, and meant to do his best to serve her. The reception room was full, and the curtain just drawing up, when he saw Zinzan standing in the recess of a doorway behind the benches. He immediately joined him.

"I want to talk with you, my good fellow," he said.

Zinzan followed him into a lobby, and they sat down in a window seat lined with damask cushions.

"None but lackeys will come here yet awhile," Joliffe said, "and they will not interrupt. I have a story to tell you. I have been figuring as the champion of innocence with no more martial weapon in my hand than an oar."

Then he told his history. Zinzan listened attentively.

"I look upon this as a lesson in military tactics," said Joliffe. "This is a campaign which is just opening ; the question is, What forces have we to bring against the enemy, and how shall we attack him? Shall we proclaim war *à outrance*, or shall we condescend to outwit him?"

"Tell her mother, and call him out," said Zinzan briefly.

"Very good, but who will be called a busy-body? and who would answer that her ladyship should not be affronted, and incredulous?"

"My mother could do that part of the affair, but I should feel somewhat as though I were creeping into the camp of the enemy behind a farthingale."

"Shall I request the damsel in marriage? 'twould be almost as distasteful to myself as to her, but 'twould be a fair pretext to challenge the monsieur."

"Absurd!" said Zinzan quickly, "quite superfluous on your part. As madam, my mother, takes an interest in the young lady, I am in a measure bound to protect her from the machinations of a villain, even more than another lady, but I do not wish to appear as a meddler. I will set her on her guard myself ; she is not too headstrong to scorn the advice of a friend, and she will then return to her mother, who, if she is wise, will not permit her out of her sight again while they are in Bath."

"You have a strong opinion of the docility of Mistress Chesney, if you imagine she will consent to be mewed up between four stone walls now she is fully fledged. Now I don't expect a miracle, and I can think of nothing better than that one of us should challenge the fellow, and that if he be

unlucky in the issue, that the other should try his better fortune, or skill. I also propose that you should wed her; 'twould give a creditable face to the thing."

"You appear to regard the lady as a parcel of goods to be disposed of to any one who chooses to inquire for it," said Zinzan impatiently. "She would not be inclined to show me the smallest favour, even were I inclined to ask it. Her mother intends her to become my Lady Ludlow. No, never will I wed a woman who comes to me a Niobe in tears, weeping for another lover."

"We are a strange pair of dunderheads for a plot," said Joliffe. "Had we Mistress Thresher here, I warrant she would hit us off half a dozen as trim as could be wished."

"The villain's object is to secure an heiress," mused Zinzan. "Now, I have reason to believe that Mistress Chesney is none at all; Spincourt is entailed, and she is dependent upon the will of her mother."

"Good," said Joliffe; "then if monsieur married her he would get his deserts, almost. But he would certainly ill-use her; perhaps poison her with some of his foreign tricks, or clap her into a convent in France, and swear she was dead. 'Twould be an effectual means of delivering her from his persecutions to show him his mistake."

"Take the earliest opportunity of doing so, you have some acquaintance with the fellow."

"But, upon my conscience, I do not see how I can avoid calling him out after having soused him in the Avon."

"Console yourself. So long as he deems it an accident, 'twill be no affront; and he is a fellow who deserves rather to be put in the stocks than aught else. He is an adventurer, with a paltry gilding of good breeding."

"True; he scarce deserves to die the death of a soldier and gentleman, at the sword's point; and I should loathe to die myself in his company."

"And I, as a public man, abhor that mad fashion of casting away life in every pitiful quarrel. 'Tis only a degree better than when, some fifty years since, they hired assassins to avenge an affront. As a private gentleman I may have no resource but to fight a villain such as this count; and I cannot see how honour is to be maintained without some such check upon the pests of society. It seems an idle dream to look forward to a time when a man's life is considered too solemn and awful a thing to be trifled with at every gust of passion and pride."

"You would, perhaps, substitute a good drubbing with fists; but, I conclude that went out on the score of fair dealing; for grant, as sometimes happens, that the honest man is a puny one and the rogue a fellow of six foot high, all brawn and sinews, I for one would prefer not being in the shoes of that same honest fellow. Then again, we, most of us, trifle away our existence in so absolute a manner that we have good reason for thinking the world would not suffer if we were suddenly put out of it by an inch of cold steel. We don't, as a rule, fasten our neighbour's pack upon our back as you are fond of doing."

"I am resolved of one thing," said Zinzan. "I intend to bring in a Bill for the suppression of those most scandalous Fleet marriages. Public feeling is not yet roused against them, but depend upon it they will be stopped before long. Let the abuse come home to one of our leading men, and they are doomed. I would gladly see that through, before I have the Frenchman's rapier through me."

"'Tis arranged then, that you venture an attack upon the young lady, and I have a word with monsieur when occasion offers. In the meantime keep something of a guard upon his movements. And now I see no reason why we should not go and witness the play. I've a curiosity to see the performance of my little cousin, Mistress Biddy Trulow. Her voice cracks the drums of my ears, but there are others which will compensate for that, and as she has the most complete assurance, and a huge admiration for herself, she may possibly succeed as an actress."

"Those qualities may become an amateur, but they would soon be hissed off a real stage," said Zinzan. "They are mere gimcrack, truly, and show their grain in presence of august genius; but I am mistaken if genius has donned sock or buskin to-night, even at the call of royalty."

The play was at the height of its interest when they entered. Looking round Joliffe saw Camilla and the count in deep conversation.

"The conspirators are at work," he whispered to Zinzan. "That bodes ill for the lamb, whom the wolf would worry, and cautions the shepherd's dogs to be on their watch to pull the grisly beast down."

Dolly had been a very inattentive looker-on. The only drama in which she took an interest was that in which Ludlow and Belinda played the sole parts, and even when she could not watch them she could think of nothing else. "He loves me, he loves me not." That was a game at which she had often played at Spincourt, with the petals of a daisy; now

it was played with her own heart she could not laugh over it any more. When the play was over, Zinzan came and stood behind her chair.

"You look very thoughtful, Mr. Zinzan," she said, smiling. "Has the play put you out of spirits?"

"May I lead you out of this crowd? If I look dull it is because I have a story to tell you which concerns yourself, and I do not know how you will take it."

"No bad news?" she cried quickly, her thoughts flashing unreasonably from her own people to Ludlow.

"None whatever of the kind you mean; but I fear to offend you."

"You arouse my curiosity, at least; and I am sure that all you can say will be kind and wise. Are you going to scold me, sir?"

"What if I am?"

"I don't know. I have not been used to scoldings of late, but I will try to put up with it. St. Ann's is the only place in which I have not felt my head whirling round with giddiness; you would make me quite wise in time!"

They had reached the lobby, and Zinzan resumed his place in the window seat.

"I like this," said Dolly; "I feel quite inclined for a scolding."

"I shall begin by saying I am perfectly aware that I am meddling with what does not concern me, and I most humbly ask your pardon therefor; then I must ask a question. Have you seen very much of M. de Bressy since you have been in Kingsmead Square, Mistress Dolly?"

Dolly sighed deeply.

"Sure, he is no friend of yours!" she exclaimed. "I have, indeed, seen far too much of him."

"That means that you would wish to see no more of him?"

"How glad I should be! but I know not how to avoid him."

"My task is easier since you say that. I wanted to set you on your guard against this unprincipled man. Are you easily alarmed?"

"I do not think I am; but I am trembling to hear what you have to say. Oh, sir, if you knew how much I detest his unwearying importunities!"

"Why then do you not return to my lady, your mother?"

"Indeed, I would be most willing, but her time is so taken up with attending on my uncle, and she has so often expressed her great contentment at my being safely bestowed with Lady Di."

"But if you told her to what distress you were subject?"

Dolly coloured, and looked down.

"I fear that, because I should have to confess that I had behaved indiscreetly in countenancing his pretensions for a moment."

"I do not think she could be offended; but, whatever you tell her, pray take my advice and return to her."

Dolly sighed and hesitated.

"Then," said Zinzan, who knew that she stood in great awe of her mother, "will you come to St Ann's? my mother would be much gratified by a visit from you."

"Once you were not so ready to invite me, Mr. Zinzan," said Dolly, with a faint smile.

"True," answered Zinzan, and remained silent for a few moments. Then he said, "At that time I thought you would be moped at St. Ann's. I do not fear that now. 'Twas partly that. But, passing that by, you will do us an honour, Mistress Dolly, if you will come. To show you that I am not needlessly alarming you, I must tell you that, had it not been most happily prevented, M. de Bressy would have carried you to London that night you were with him on the river. This was heard from his own lips; how or when I am not at liberty to say, but you may rely upon it. His design was the most infamous one of a compulsory marriage at the Fleet, where, doubtless you know, a base trade is made of such affairs, in order to aid villains such as M. de Bressy."

Dolly gazed at him with a pale and frightened face. She felt at that moment as if he was her only friend.

"And, but for that happy, happy accident, he might have succeeded!" she cried. "Sir! sir! tell me how I can escape from this monster? I feel as though I were in his power!"

"I am grieved to distress you so greatly," said Zinzan, with unwonted gentleness. "But I will serve you to the utmost of my power; I will watch over you until you are safe with my Lady Chesney; and you have, besides, a friend who does not wish his name mentioned."

"How inexpressibly good you are to me, Mr. Zinzan; I cannot say how grateful I feel."

"You have nothing to be grateful for, Mistress Dolly. What I have done, and what I shall do, will be only what any gentleman would wish to do."

"Nevertheless, I cannot deem less of your kindness."

"And, now, shall I take you back? I see the company assembling again for the games."

"I do not feel in the least disposed to join in them, but I suppose I must," said Dolly.

She requested to be left with Madam Zinzan, and had not been talking to her long, before the princess came up to speak to her old friend.

Presently Madam said, "I see your royal highness has a china jar of the same pattern as one I possess. I had never seen its like before."

"And from whence did you procure it, madam?"

"'Twas through the means of my younger son, madam. It seems that the son of a poor woman, whom, in the course of his ministration, he became interested in, had been a voyage to China—being a sailor, I understand—and had brought these vases, for there were three of them, with great difficulty home. The poor woman was most anxious to sell them, and I being in Berkshire, my son got them disposed of at the 'Civet Cat,' and when I came to Bath, and heard of them, there was but one left, which I bought at once. I was angry with my son—much put out, indeed—because I have a particular whim for this light-coloured ware."

Dolly suddenly recalled the scene at the "Civet Cat," when she had first seen Bernard. This then was the explanation of it. She remembered how scornfully Ludlow and Camilla had spoken of him, and how she had despised him.

"Then, madam," said the princess, warmly, "you must do me the favour to accept the vases—I have the pair. It will give me great pleasure to send them to you to-morrow, madam."

"Your royal highness does me too much honour," said Madam Zinzan, surprised and pleased.

The princess smiled graciously, and went away to superintend a game she had instituted, called "The Posie," in which, as in the modern cotillion, partners were chosen for a dance. Dolly was desired to join the circle of players, which she did with no great alacrity. The poor girl had no heart left for amusements, especially those which required some amount of animal spirits to make them go off well. Her stolen glances at Ludlow had only shown her that he was more earnest in his attentions to the fair Belinda than usual, but the cruel thought would creep into her mind that this might be only in order to make her think him indifferent. She

blamed herself entirely by this time for the quarrel, and thought no wonder he was angry when she had been so unkind and ungentle as to refuse him a flower when he asked for it so humbly. She would make a last effort to reclaim her truant, and if that failed she would blame herself for ever, not him. It could not be that she had been deceived, and it was equally impossible that he should be fickle enough to be caught by every new face. She took her seat, resolved to avail herself of the first opportunity which offered of making peace. When Ludlow was called upon to play his part in the game, he took three roses from among a quantity of both real and artificial flowers lying on a table, and offered them to Mistress Sturges.

"I bring you a pink rose, which blushes for its inferiority; a white one, which says, 'I die of envy;' and a red one, which says, 'You have pierced me to the heart.' I bind them together with a true-love knot, and put them in Cupid's quiver, upon which I inscribe—

"'Ask me no more where Jove bestows,
When June is past, the fading rose,
For in your beauties orient deep,
There flowers as in their causes sleep.'"

Mistress Sturges accepted both flowers and compliment with the air of a queen receiving homage due; and Ludlow led her off to the dance. On their return, Camilla glided up to him and said—

"I bring you hither moneywort, rosemary, and a reed, and bid you take your choice; two are bound with rue. I place them in a funeral urn, upon which I write—

"'In summer living, and in winter dead.'"

As Ludlow bowed his acknowledgment, he murmured—

"There is *no* choice for me. But what stands the reed for?"

"Fickle fancy," answered Camilla, as they took their places.

M. de Bressy crossed the circle to Dolly.

"Deign to accept," he said, "a leaf of aspen for sighs, a leaf of willow for tears, an immortelle for loyalty. I bind them with the bandage from Cupid's eyes, and place them in the casket of Pandora. At the bottom of the casket lies my motto."

"I hope it may," said Joliffe to Zinzan. "And now I shall adventure my fortune."

As Dolly came back to her seat he said, in a low, significant tone—"The posie I bring you is not of my binding.

"'Sweet is the rose, but grows upon a brier;
Sweet is the juniper, but sharp his bough;
Sweet is the eglantine, but pricketh near;
Sweet is the fir-bloom, but his branches rough.'"

"Against what does he warn me?" considered Dolly. "'Tis true of the whole of life, I think—at least here."

When it came to her turn, she said to Zinzan, "Sir, I would give my flowers to you; they shall be—ivy for trust, and fir for friendship, and I will plant them in a flower-pot, that they may grow; but I cannot think of a motto; I am not quick at such conceits."

"Mine be the motto, then," returned Zinzan, "though I fear you may deem it homely and rude.

"'Gilding may wear away,
But leather shall last for aye.'"

"That is a very fair motto for friendship," said Dolly.

"Aye, and for life," said Zinzan.

As the game continued, Dolly, being by Camilla, touched her on the arm. "Give this for me," she whispered, "I cannot give it myself," and she put into Camilla's hand a bunch of violets, upon the stalks of which she had slipped a little ring Ludlow knew well.

"I beseech you, Cammy, take an early opportunity, 'twill be the greatest kindness you can show me."

Camilla took the violets without looking into Dolly's appealing face. Dolly went away sick at heart with anxiety. Now she should see how he would take the peace-offering, and if they were ever to be friends again. She watched as well as she could for a time, she saw Camilla speak to him, but he did not come near her. Ludlow had come to the princess's neither for acting or games, but for the express purpose of putting his fate to the touch with Mistress Belinda. The time for winning or losing all had come, for his horizon was daily becoming more overcast. His debts of honour were of frightful magnitude, and he had not yet plucked one plume from Fortune's pinions to wing him on his way. Mistress Sturges's fortune glittered maddeningly before his longing eyes; and now he was going to

put out his hand to grasp it, and it remained to be seen if he had been pursuing a shadow or not all this time. Even his self-assurance grew faint, for the stake was so immense. A word from that haughty, fair-faced woman, who had listened half-sulkily and half-pleased to his wooing, without betraying by so much as a glance if she cared for him, while yet she kept him at her side, would cut the cord by which he hung over the abyss, or bear him triumphantly past wave and rock into security. But what after all had the irresistible Piers Ludlow to fear? Belinda had a beautiful face, and a great store of guineas; but was not he splendid in person also, and able to make her my lady? And with all her faultless form, Belinda was dull-witted, and he was brilliant and popular, and of good parts; that he was somewhat superficial mattered not at all. After a careful weighing of their respective advantages, his courage rose, and he applied himself to besieging the fortress with as much elation of spirits as if the mural crown were already his. After supper he led her into a tiny silken gilded room, opening from the saloon in which dancing was going on. When Mistress Belinda was not in an obstinate and wilful mood, she was passive as a puppet in the hands of any one who saved her the trouble of thinking where she should go, or what she should do next. It was less trouble to sit, and be talked to, than to dance, so she sat down, as much at her ease as was compatible with steel and whalebone, in a deep heavy velvet chair; while Ludlow, like a glittering prince in a fairy tale, with his big brown eyes looking less *nonchalant* than usual, and his handsome curved mouth betraying a degree of unaccustomed nervousness, began to put his hopes and aspirations into plain terms, and eventually went down as in duty bound upon one knee at his mistress's feet, to urge his suit more forcibly. Now had Mistress Belinda a heart of adamant, that she should say "nay" to so fine a petitioner as this, who, bending gracefully before her, hung upon the answer which must fall from her rose-leaf lips? There was a moment's pause. "Mine!" thought Ludlow triumphantly. Belinda, who was slow to admire anything beyond what her own mirror reflected, did, nevertheless, feel something like admiration as she let her blue eyes rest upon him, kneeling there. She even thought, "'Tis a pity 'tis so;" but without the slightest emotion. The loss of a brilliant out of a necklace would have ruffled her a great deal more; the omission of her name in the list for a royal ball would have touched her fifty times more nearly.

"Sir, I pray you to rise," she said in so collected a manner that Ludlow

looked up startled. "Spare yourself further pains; my hand is promised to my lord Marquis of D——, who would be waiting on me now in Bath, had not a sudden distemper prevented him."

There needed no more words to bring Ludlow to his feet, with his bright aërial castle tumbling about his ears. If Dolly could have been aware of his thorough discomfiture and humiliation, she, if no other human being, would have felt pity for him. So that dull pettish heiress had been making a fool of him! It was unbearable! For once in his life Ludlow forgot his good breeding, and dashed out of the room and out of the house tempestuously, leaving Mistress Sturges alone, to find her way back to the rest of the company or not, as she pleased. She shrugged her shoulders; not in Camilla's quick fashion, but with the deliberation peculiar to herself, and then she went half to sleep in her velvet chair, with her cheek resting on one hand. Ludlow raged and fretted, double locked into solitude, hating her and all the world, and wondering where he should turn next. Dolly observed his continued absence with cold dismay; slowly and bitterly came the conviction that all was really over now.

Captain Joliffe was in the act of wrapping his cloak round him in preparation for departure, when his cousin Mistress Biddy Trulow bounced out upon him, and half whispered, laughing all the time, holding him with both hands, "Cousin Will! cousin Will! I never heard of such a frolic in all my life! Oh! to think of my being hid up behind the curtain, and they not to know! 'twas rare! I never did hear anything so purely delightful!"

"Hold your tongue, child; I have no wish to hear eavesdroppers' tales," said Joliffe.

But Biddy clung to him.

"Nay, but, pretty cousin Will, I must tell you. The count is going to run off with Mistress Dolly Chesney to-night. I never thought the little puss had so much spirit. He is to carry her to London in his coach. I heard him tell Cammy all about it; and she is to get Lady Di out of the way. 'Tis veritable truth, cousin, as sure as my name is Biddy Trulow."

"Go to your mother, child, and say not one word of this to another soul, or thou shalt be my cousin Biddy no longer, and that means farewell to suckets and fairings; my word for that, little miss."

As soon as he had rid himself of Mistress Biddy, he took a hasty

survey of the ballroom, and then went out into the street, which was lined with carriages and chairs. Rain was pouring down, and the horses stood fetlock deep in mud. The footmen crowded into the deep portico to save their curled wigs, and there was noisy talk and some wrangling among them. Joliffe sauntered out, and stood just outside the portico, close to where M. de Bressy's footman was trying to push his way in among the others, with loud complaints of ungentlemanlike treatment from them.

"Hard measure for you, my man," said Joliffe; "and I warrant you will not see your master yet."

The man grumbled, and pushed more vigorously.

"Can't thee see there be not standing room?" said one of the lackeys.

"I be as good a gentleman's servant as e'er a one o' you!"

"Keep him out, keep him out! he be servant to a Popish Frenchman," cried another voice.

"Come," said Joliffe, "hold your peace, and take this to drink your master's health, and confusion to Popish plots. At the 'Bladud Arms' yonder you will find shelter enough!"

And he thrust a couple of guineas into his hand.

"And, look ye here, bid your fellow-coachman give the horses to a link-boy, and join in a cup. Off with you, 'twill keep the rain out better than Bath stone. There is no occasion to hurry back, for I have a little matter of business with your master."

The man went off in grinning triumph, and Joliffe then dispatched a messenger for Zinzan. He exchanged a few words with him on his appearance, and then mounted the box of the count's coach.

In a few moments M. de Bressy came quickly into the portico, leading Dolly, who looked hurried and alarmed.

"Pray let me inquire if it be absolutely certain that Lady Di is waiting in the coach,'" she said.

"Nay, but, dearest me-es, did she not absolutely command me to bring you in all haste?" Zinzan heard him reply.

"See, here is the coach; hasten, hasten, this rain is terrific."

The oil lamps were contending feebly with the darkness of the night. There was the usual scene of jostling, fighting, and swearing among chairmen and link-boys. Torches flared, to show the pools in the road, and

spluttered in the rain. The count half carried, half pushed Dolly into the carriage. She screamed upon finding it empty, and struggled in terror to escape him. He was in the act of pushing her back and stepping in, when a hand closed upon his collar and laid him low in a slough of liquid mud. By the time the blinded, bewildered, and enraged Frenchman had struggled on to his feet, Zinzan had banged the coach door, saying to Dolly, "You are safe," and Joliffe had whipped up the horses and taken them at speed down the street. When M. de Bressy stood up, well plastered with mud, amid the rude laughter of the bystanders, and faced his enemy, Zinzan cut short a volley of French expletives by saying—

"Sir, I am Zinzan, of St. Ann's Court, and shall hold myself in readiness for a message from you to-morrow; I presume you will require satisfaction for your muddy coat; and I beg to say I have not done with you yet."

He turned away with a ceremonious salute; and the count, breaking through the crowd in the opposite direction, hurried away as speedily as he could, to indulge in his wrath and hide his disgrace in the privacy of his own lodgings.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MEADOWES FAMILY COME TO TOWN.

"YOU have seen the count?" said Zinzan to Captain Joliffe the next day, as the latter entered the library of St. Ann's.

Joliffe took a chair. "Pray, for what reason are you arranging all those papers?" he demanded.

"In order to leave as little confusion behind me as possible, supposing the Frenchman is more skilful with his rapier than I am."

"Pooh!" returned Joliffe. "The better cause will nerve your sword-arm."

"'Tis well to be prepared, at any rate," said Zinzan, "and to give as little trouble as need be to others. What said the count?"

"A great deal concerning the insult his august person had received at your hands; and he will not be satisfied with drawing blood. He wished to know if you were a rival aspirant to the hand and fortune of Mistress Chesney."

"And you said——?"

"I told him that the fortune was mythical, to his very great amazement. He did not half believe me, but he said something to the effect that if I was not misinformed, he would, after avenging his wrongs by running you through, thank you a thousand times for saving him from carrying out his design."

"So, in any case, Mistress Chesney is safe from him."

"I presume she is. He will doubtless turn his attention in some other direction shortly."

Zinzan rose and went to the window. "There is that brother of mine walking up and down the broad walk," he said. "I shall say nothing about this affair to him. Where is the meeting to take place?"

"In the meadow beyond Foss Lane, just before sundown."

"Very good! Call for me on your way. If one of us fall, 'twill not be the Frenchman; for I shall seek to do no more than disable him for a time."

After much hesitation, Dolly had adopted the half measure of writing to her mother to propose returning to her; but the answer had been that Mr. Bellingham preferred her remaining where she was for the present. She then told Lady Di how the count had entrapped her into the carriage; but Lady Di laughed, and said she did not believe he had intended running off with her in that summary fashion. She insisted upon Dolly's going with her to a sale that afternoon, and Dolly consented, half because she was afraid of being left alone, and half on account of a restless desire for any variety.

The sale-room was crowded, for besides the ordinary attractions, there was a quantity of smuggled French lace and silk to be sold. Mr. Nash was almost torn to pieces between ladies anxious to have the benefit of his judgment in their choice. With his cream-coloured beaver under his arm he glided about, feeling muslin, scanning China plates with a critical eye, and trying snuff with a curious nose.

"Pray, Mr. Nash, come and tell me which you think will be the mode, sprigged or striped chintz for sacks," cried Lady Blunt.

"Did you not hear, madam, that the princess has discarded her sprigs?" said Camilla.

"Heavens, how lucky you told me!" cried Lady Blunt. "Then it must be the stripes."

"But then again the Duchess of Kingston has given out that she shall wear no more stripes since they are become so common."

"But, dear Mistress Camilla, what shall I do? Oh, Nash, come and advise with me, there is a good soul!"

Mr. Nash, escaping from a discussion upon the merits of a crane's-bill silk, flew to check the burst of tears which was impending.

"Nash, I am so put to it. Mistress Cammy tells me that the princess

has declared against sprigs, and the Duchess of Kingston against stripes; what am I to do?"

"'Tis indeed a question!"

"These are both charming, though I do think stripes odiously common, and as for sprigs, every gown I have had made seems sprigs."

"Shall we decide by the texture, my dear lady?"

"Nay, they are just alike."

"Then, 'pon my honour, it must be between whether the princess or the duchess have the better taste! Sure no one can decide that so well as Lady Blunt."

"Oh! you are always very obliging, Nash, and I really think I have resolved. Stripes are common. I shall take the sprig. I will have the piece measured."

It was unfolded, when she suddenly exclaimed—

"No, the princess will be sure to observe if I wear a sprig after she has discarded it. Measure the stripe, I think I will take that."

Nash, foreseeing another half-hour of wavering, slipped away, and his place was taken by the ever-ready Simmonds. There was arguing and discussion on every side, and voices waxing loud in dispute.

"Monstrous! monstrous! why the most superficial eye could——"

"Ching dynasty to a certainty—look at the texture!"

"Why they would be worth ten guineas the piece! Good copy, nothing more."

"My dear madam," said another voice in Dolly's ear, "will you have the complaisance to take a pinch of this snuff? There don't seem any difference to me; but I dare say you don't take as much as I do, and you will know which is the best. I must have the best you know, the very best, even if I pawn my silver spoons; horn will do as well you know, but one should always have the best of snuff."

"That little antiquated fudge lives on snuff," whispered Camilla. "'Tis credibly reported that she has barrels of it in her house."

"Now I mean to have that bit of tapestry work, whatever it goes for," said another little old dame. "'Twill make the fiftieth piece I have of shepherds and shepherdesses."

"Dolly!" cried Camilla, "I am dying of laughter at those country people yonder. Did you ever behold such a mountain of roast beef as that squire, and such bouncing lassies as his daughters? Do observe their

heads! and the creatures' shoes! made to walk in their ploughed fields; and, my love, the mother's green grogram gown, with russet ribbons too!"

Dolly recognized in these fresh importations some country neighbours of theirs, and exclaimed in great surprise—

"Why, 'tis the Meadoweses!"

But Camilla did not hear, as Lady Blunt threw her arms round her convulsed with laughter.

"My good creature, I shall expire of looking at those odd folks. They are the most perfect savages."

After this and sundry other remarks from Camilla, Dolly had not the courage to claim acquaintance with her old friends, and she drew behind the others that they might not observe her. When the auction began, Lady Di, who had vowed not to bid for a single thing, because Mr. Buckler had been in such a cranky mood lately that she was afraid he would refuse her the ruby necklet she had set her heart upon, was foremost among the bidders, nodding, whispering, rapping china, and fingering stuffs.

"Cammy," whispered Dolly, "do you think Sir Piers likely to come here?"

"No, I don't. Have you ever been told that 'tis waste of time crying over spilt milk?"

"You are a cross-patch, Camilla, and very unkind."

"You are wrong. You will be grateful to me some day."

"Did he send any message about the ring? 'Twas so strange that he should say nothing at all."

"I'm sick of talking about it. This is poor fun for folks with empty purses. Come away. I will make our excuses to Lady Di."

Dolly's Hampshire friends were not too much taken up with the sale to look about in hopes of espying acquaintances, and especially Dolly herself. Mistress Prissy, Dulcy, and Patty had their eyes in every corner of the room until they lit upon her suddenly. Then commenced a furious nodding, smiling, and beckoning, and a great effort to persuade "brother Nat" to make his way through the crowd to her.

"Bless me, why they are friends of yours!" exclaimed Camilla, sarcastically. "I beg a thousand pardons for my rude speeches."

"They are old playmates of mine," said Dolly. "Good people, though they look odd here."

"Not in the least, doubtless 'tis only my want of taste. You may depend they will bring in the fashion of clouted shoes and grogram gowns, my dear."

Dolly was glad to get away from the sale-room, for however great her esteem for her friends, she did not care to see them in company with Camilla. They went on to St. Mary's Ramparts, but as the band was not playing, they found them deserted, and a keen wind drove them away. As they turned they came unexpectedly into the midst of the Meadowes' family party.

"Hallo," cried the squire, in his cheery open-air voice, "here's Dolly Chesney."

There was a chorus of—

"La, Dolly! Why, Dolly, we were talking of you only now. Dolly, I was thinking maybe we should meet you!"

And Prissy, Patty, and Dulcy, who were all tall, stout young women, crowded round Dolly, trying which could assure her most loudly of their joy in the meeting. Mr. Nat drew behind his tall sisters, became ruddier in the face than before, and cruelly squeezed his hat into all manner of shapes. They were all brimming over with excitement; they wanted Dolly to return to tea with them; their lodgings were in Spurrier's Lane, so she might take them on her way home. Would her friend favour them too? they would be proud to see any friend of dear Dolly's. Camilla excused herself very glibly; but Dolly, who was ashamed of having been ashamed of her old friends, consented to drink tea with them, after leaving Camilla in Kingsmead Square.

"So this is your fashionable Bath, Miss Dolly," said the squire, as they sat round the tea-table. "'Tis not much to my taste, I promise you. We came here for sister Flavy's rheumatism; and directly she can put a foot to the ground we shall be off again, bag and baggage."

"Father!" cried the three girls together, with disconsolate faces.

"I'll tell you what I saw to-day at this juggling sale to which madam dragged me. A parcel of silly women, and a parcel of sillier men, naggling over a parcel of foreign gimcracks, as if the good of the country was concerned in their getting them a halfpenny cheaper than their worth. There was a fellow they call Sir Midas Digges, worth a plum they tell me; good family I know. Madam, that man was chaffering over a bit of crockery for a good half-hour, and went away chuckling because he had

cheated another man into thinking it of less value than it was. That man, madam, sold his honour for a cracked tea-cup!"

"But, no doubt, the poor gentleman wanted it, Mr. Meadowes," said his wife. "I don't set much store by a tea-cup myself if it should happen to have a crack; they don't hold water so well I've noticed."

"Then, again," resumed the squire, "there was my Lady Groundsel, turned of eighty, Nash told me, couldn't make up her mind for half an hour between two French laces forsooth for her next ball gown. Cheating the revenue, and sending good British gold into France. The only thing we ought to send there is an army in good fighting trim, madam!"

"Indeed, Mr. Meadowes, I've no opinion of fighting," said madam; "many a poor creature gets sadly hurt who might not have been if he had stayed at home."

"And the Frenchmen are very polite, sir," put in Dulcy.

"I do not like them at all," said Dolly, decidedly.

"Well said, my dear, stick to that; you are a true Englishwoman. Don't let me hear you talking of their dancing-master manners, you little hussies."

Dulcy opened her blue eyes and red mouth wide, and looked ashamed of herself.

"Dolly," whispered Patty, "do you know we were at the assembly two evenings back? Prissy danced: only think of that."

"And did it give you pleasure?"

"Oh! we were hugely pleased, we never saw so many fine folks before."

"Mistress Dolly, my love," said Mrs. Meadowes. "What a trial it is for my lady, your mamma, to be away just when the plums and the gages are ready for picking. I had a busy time before we left, I promise you, and what with the pears, and the mulberry jelly, I am sure I don't know how—but, my love, is that the fashionable way of dressing the head? You must tell us all about it. I wonder if your mother ever tried my recipe for brandied peaches. Yes, when I saw you so finely dressed, I said to my girls, Mistress Dolly is too grand a lady to speak to us now, so you must make up your minds to it. Patty almost cried—didn't you, my dear?—you and Patty were such playfellows always."

"Father said Dolly was not the girl to forget old friends," said Dulcy. "But I thought she looked haughty when she saw us; I said so to Nat—didn't I, Nat?"

"Dolly, are you acquainted with many of the fine folks?" asked Patty, in the subdued voice in which the girls always spoke in the presence of their father.

"I should not think she cared about them," said Nat, who had not yet summoned up courage to address Dolly directly.

"That is because we said that Nat did not look like a fashionable beau," said Prissy.

"Well, I think Nat looked as smart as any of them," said his mother. "A wishy-washy set of men; and the squire thought so too—didn't you, squire?"

"Who was the tall, swaggering fellow that all your daughters were crazy about, madam?" demanded the squire.

"Sir Piers Ludlow," answered all the girls in a breath.

"Eh? do you know anything about him, Mistress Dolly?"

"Yes, I am acquainted with him," answered Dolly, faintly.

"Who was his partner?"

"Mistress Betty Scrope," answered Prissy, the eldest and prettiest of the sisters. "And we did think that he might better have invited us to dance, than stand by as he did, most part of the evening, only talking."

"I'm sure, Prissy, I should have been in a great fright if he had," said Patty.

"Was Mistress Belinda Sturges there?"

"I don't think she was. Oh! Dolly, next night was the princess's play-acting, and I did so cry when I heard the carriages pass by."

"I stopped up my ears and went to sleep," said Patty.

"Dolly, do tell us what the princess wore; she had the loveliest primrose sack at the assembly."

"We made sure of seeing Mistress Dolly there, Dulcy," said Nat. "Didn't we?"

A quarrel between Lady Di and Camilla had been the reason for Dolly's not going to the ball, so she passed over the remark.

"When I hear the words sack, trimmings, bombazine, and padsy, I always leave the women to themselves," cried the squire, "and I'm off. Are you coming, Nat? Now, Mistress Dolly, don't fill the lasses' heads with beaux and balls, I shall have enough ado to get them safe back into Hampshire as it is."

Mr. Meadowes banged the door after him, and was heard ponderously

creaking down the wooden stairs; when the last sound of his stout shoes had ceased, Mrs. Meadowes drew her chair close to Dolly.

"Now tell us, my love, if you are to be married soon?"

"Indeed, no, madam."

All the girls exclaimed in different notes of surprise and dissatisfaction.

"Ah, Mistress Dolly, you are coming back among us, after all. I said to poor Nat——"

"Madam!" gasped the young squire.

"Yes, my dear, I was only going to tell Dolly Chesney what you said to me."

"I didn't mean anything at all, mother!" stammered Nat.

"And so you see Mistress Dolly isn't married at all, nor any chance of it, she says. My dear, isn't your good mamma disappointed, with such a fine, handsome young lady as you are? I assure you I shall think myself hardly used if I don't marry one or two of my daughters before I leave Bath. There is a very pretty little portion for each of them, without harming Nat."

"Father would be sadly vexed, ma'am," said Patty.

"Yes, my dear, but I've seen him put out before now, and a kinder man never breathed, and to be sure nothing would please him better than to see Nat married——"

"Mother," said Dulcy, "do talk to Dolly about our new gowns."

"Ah, to be sure!" Then ensued a long discussion. Presently Dulcy whispered, "Dolly, dear, Nat wagered with me that you would be married by this time; so I have won a green feather for my head. I should have been mighty vexed to have lost it."

"I do not think you should have made the wager, Dulcy."

"Why, bless my heart, here is the squire back!" exclaimed Mrs. Meadowes, as a trampling was heard on the stairs. The door burst open, and Squire Meadowes ushered in Grenville Zinzan and Captain Joliffe, with repeated and hearty welcomes.

How those two came to be there instead of facing Count de Bressy in the meadow beyond Foss Lane remains to be accounted for. At the appointed time they had set out together, and arrived on the ground at about the same time as the count and his second. M. de Bressy was full of courtesy, and fuller still, though less visibly, of hate and anger. He had resolved that Zinzan should not leave the field alive. In spite, however,

of this resolve, they were destined to return their rapiers to their sheaths without a stain, for in one of the first passes the count's high French heel turned, and he measured his length upon the ground with a sprained ankle, while his weapon flew out of his hand, leaving him an unarmed knight at the mercy of his antagonist. Zinzan reversed the operation of the previous night, and picked him up instead of knocking him down. Being partially restored to his feet, the count made profuse apologies, and the meeting was adjourned, as he expressed it, to a happier day. Zinzan and his friend had nothing left, therefore, but to return, which they did, leaving the count extremely wroth at his ill luck, for he fancied himself a better swordsman than his adversary. On their way through Foss Lane they were boisterously greeted by Squire Meadowes, who was an old friend of the Zinzans, and who hailed the sight of a familiar face in these strange streets with a joy that was almost pathetic. He dragged them off to Spurrier's Lane, and brought them in triumphantly, as if they had been the proud spoils of his bow and spear. Slapping them on the back, and rubbing his hands, he begged, he urged, he insisted that they should stay to supper. He stopped Dolly upon the brink of departure, and bade her make herself easy, because he had sent round to Lady Di to say that she would sup with them. Dolly did not much care; tossed from place to place, she was never left to herself, and it made little difference where she was, for she never left her heart-ache behind her.

The squire and Zinzan talked about crops, Joliffe entertained Mrs. Meadowes, and was entertained by her. Prissy, Patty, and Dulcy sat round with their mittened hands folded, smiling and blushing, and occasionally giggling. Dolly looked pale and weary by them, and Mrs. Meadowes broke off in the midst of a dissertation on the management of fowls, to observe that Bath did not seem to agree with her, and to wonder whether it was the want of wholesome food, for she had no opinion of that which was sold in shops. Then came a hot supper, and a bowl of punch, and after that the squire sent out for a fiddler, and insisted upon a dance.

"Here is a place for a gentleman to come into!" exclaimed he, when the room was cleared. "Dirty stained floors, and rush-bottomed chairs, and a rickety table! And the best gentry of the land come here for pleasure, and leave their comfortable houses to servants and rats who eat them out!" But a vigorous dance to the tune of "The White Cockade" put him in a better humour.

"This is the first time I have not wished myself out of Bath!" he said, pausing in his caperings. "A place, sir, where the men are dressed by the milliners, and the women by the tailors. Where you do nothing all day but dangle about the promenades in high-heeled shoes, and bow till there is no brim left to your beaver. I should like to turn the hot water over the town, and wash it clear of every Merry Andrew of them; it's enough to put a sober man like me into a passion. Zinzan, I'm mightily glad, I can tell you, not to see you mincing about like the other puppets."

"I hope that is no reflection upon me, sir," said Joliffe, with affected concern.

"Oh! sir, no one could think you loved fine clothes!" said Patty, who was his partner, intending to reassure him.

"You are a soldier, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Meadowes, "and know better than to strut about in popinjays' feathers with a parcel of fribblers. A standing army is the backbone of the country, sir, and a soldier is always welcome to my house."

"You do me honour, sir; if the army is supported by the country gentlemen, it need fear no enemy—even in the House of Commons."

"Very good, sir, I shall be glad to see you down at my place in Hampshire, for some shooting. Come, madam, you've sat long enough to recover your breath, these young ones don't step it out half as nimbly as we old folk. Mistress Dolly, you must spur up Nat; the boy must be in love; he is as stupid as an owl, and as heavy-footed as a cart-horse. Now strike up, 'Oh! what a beau my Grannie was,' man, and off again."

At length Zinzan led out Dolly, and when they had danced for a short time, they sat down rather apart. Zinzan said—

"Were you angry at my want of ceremony the other night, Mistress Dolly? I knew you were safe, and had no time to think of anything else."

"It was like a bad dream," said Dolly. "Was it in truth another wicked device on the part of the count?"

"It was, truly. We were just in time to frustrate it."

"I feel quite oppressed by the weight of gratitude I owe you."

"Nay, I confess I was off my guard; and if you owe any thanks it is to Captain Joliffe, who promptly took advantage of an accidental knowledge of the count's design; but he would not thank me for mentioning his name."

"He, then, is my unknown friend. But, sir, I am afraid to quit the house now for fear of that wicked man."

"Be reassured. He has sprained his ankle to-day so severely that it will be some little time before he is about again. He will be bound to a sedan for at least a couple of weeks. By that time, I trust, you will be with Lady Chesney or madam my mother. Are you inclined to come to St. Ann's?"

"As much as another place. Indeed, I am very sensible of your goodness."

"I could have wished a somewhat different answer, for your sake, Mistress Dolly; nevertheless, come, if you will, even though it be with indifference."

"What will your brother say? I fear he must have an ill opinion of me."

"On the contrary," said Zinzan, quickly; "he would gladly see you at St. Ann's."

"Then I will get my mamma to permit me to go."

"You will find a very sincere welcome. I am glad to meet you among old friends, Mistress Dolly; I am inclined to think you may find them more reliable than new ones."

"I am glad too; and yet I think I must have changed. I am sorry, but my old playmates seem somewhat insipid to me."

"I am not much surprised," said Zinzan.

"'Tis my fault, assuredly, for they are such good people; but 'tis strange how different they appear here to what they do at home."

"Nature is the one thing totally disallowed in fashionable life. I hope these young ladies will not stay long enough in Bath to learn that."

"I think they had better not remain here long, or they may forget how to enjoy themselves. Mr. Zinzan, I wish to ask you to be good enough to walk by me to Kingsmead Square to-night. I shall only feel safe if you are within call."

"You honour me by your confidence, which I have done little to deserve."

"I am happy to find any one to trust; there are so few of whose truth and honour one can be certain."

"Truth and honour ought to be common to every gentleman, Mistress Dolly."

"It is so difficult to tell whom to trust. The whole world seems false; before I came here I knew nothing about that; nothing about distrusting persons—even friends—and finding different meanings in their words. But I hate suspicion; I would rather trust on, even—even though in the end I should be deceived!" and Dolly's voice trembled a little as she spoke.

"Faith misplaced is a bitter thing," answered Zinzan. "'If in the brew we steep the rue' wilfully, the draught is well-nigh unbearable."

"You are wondrous wise, and doubtless you deem me wondrous foolish," said Dolly, smiling; "but I think the worst thing of all would be to mistake by over-suspiciousness."

"There is a sort of distrust which is to be commended; it is that of the kid who shut the door upon the wolf in spite of his amiable blandishments," said Zinzan.

And then, fearing Dolly might be offended, he changed the conversation. But Dolly thought of no other wolf at that moment than a foreign one; she forgot that in one disguise or another they still infest English life, and dropping the old titles which terrified and warned people, call themselves by ordinary English names. We have cut down a vast deal of forest, so these dangerous beasts have adopted lairs which they might least be expected to haunt. Some are human wolves, and those in Dolly's time often prowled in velvet and gold lace, as well as in darkness and rags; and some are *in*human wolves, who, permitted among the dwellings of the poor, sometimes turn and rend the rich, in spite of the oranges stuck with spice which they hold to their refined nostrils. And there are even petted wolves, whose sheepskins are fitted so excellently well, that not one person in a dozen observes the seams, and they are led about in a ribbon, and fed on sweetmeats.

Captain Joliffe had come with Squire Meadowes and his friend Zinzan because he did not know how to make his escape, but he stayed because he was well entertained. The three fresh country damsels, so dimpled and pleased, and unsophisticated, were a more agreeable sight to him than a ball-room full of belles. He took Prissy for his first partner because she was the eldest, but he also saw that she was the prettiest of the sisters. He was disappointed to find that she was ambitious of being a fine lady, and slightly disposed to be envious of Dolly. Next came Patty, whose pleasant voice made her provincial accent rather pretty than otherwise; and finding Dulcy's spirits carried her to the extent of romping, he settled

that Patty was the most to be admired of the three, and on their way home that night he startled Zinzan by saying—

"That girl shall be my wife."

"Good heavens, which girl?" demanded Zinzan.

"Mistress Patty."

"Why you have never seen her till this evening, man!"

"I have seen quite enough to decide me."

"I did not think you so rash."

"Not at all rash. I have known for years what I require, and the first moment of meeting a person is the only unprejudiced one. I reckon you men rash who don't see where you are going till love has his manacles fast upon you."

"That is a singular plea for your madness. I hope you are not serious."

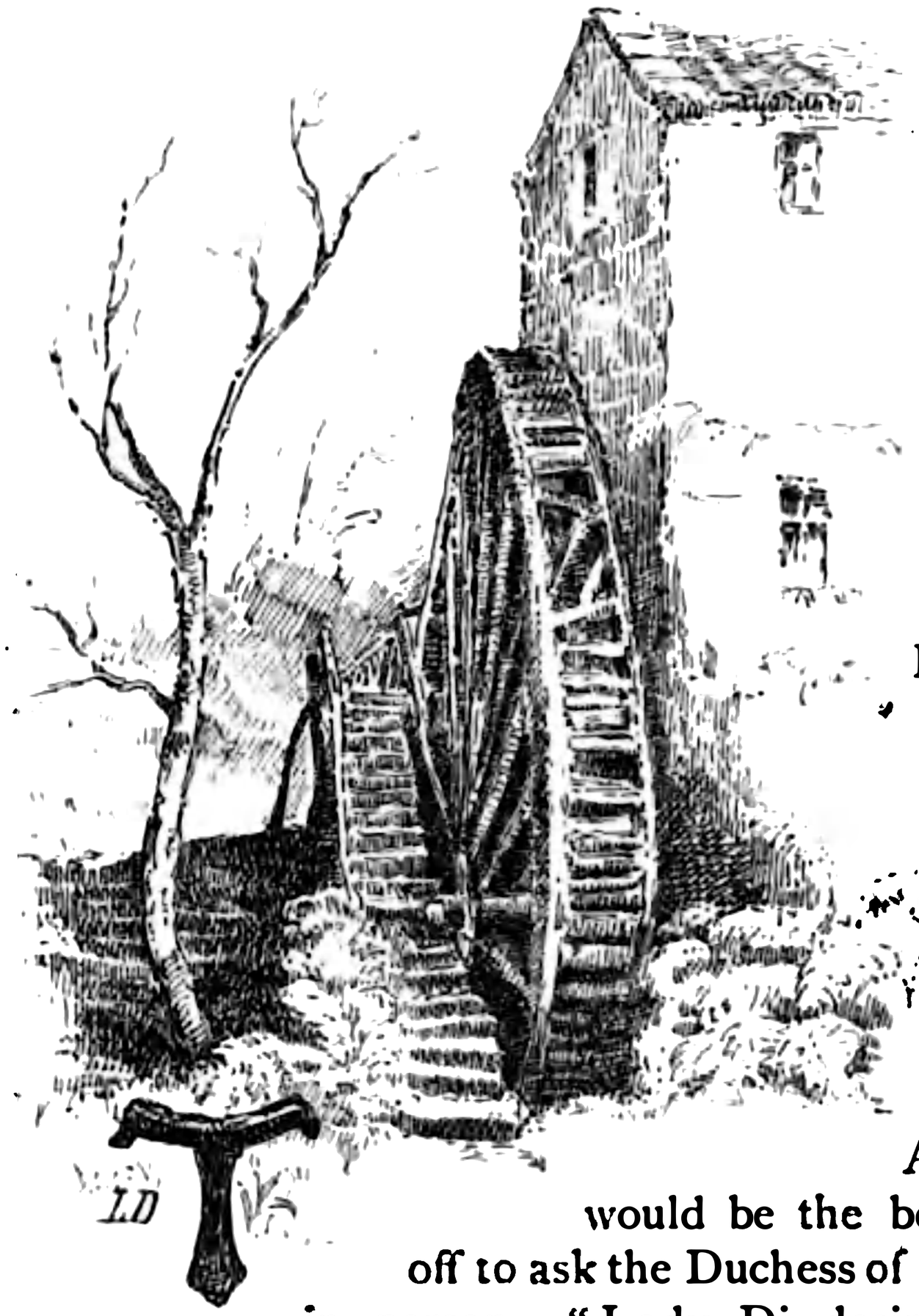
"Upon my honour I am. You will see I shall have a better wife than most men of your acquaintance."

"And your grounds for expecting this are that you know nothing of the young lady, nor she of you, but that you regard a pair of rosy cheeks and a merry laugh sufficient assurances."

"Quite sufficient. But I did not expect you to agree with me. You are one of those men who wake up one day to find that they have so long parted with their heart without missing it, that 'tis vain to hope to reclaim it. Then you are in an evil case, for the chances are ten to one that your eyes are opened by your mistress wedding another man."

"My good fellow, I have nothing to fear; I have purchased my freedom."

"My poor friend! Well we are each fully satisfied with our own wisdom; and that doubtless is a most excellent proof of it. I shall very shortly demand Mistress Patty in marriage, and shall have great pleasure in bidding you to my wedding."



CHAPTER XV.

LADY DI'S FROLIC.

THE weather was so unusually fine that the whim seized Lady Di that she would have a gipsying party into the country. She set down Camilla to write the invitations directly the idea occurred to her, and she had settled that St. Alphage's Well, near Lansdown, would be the best place to go to. She went off to ask the Duchess of Kingston and Mistress Sturges in person. "Lady Di desires you to invite your gentle rustics from Spurrier's Lane," said Camilla, "and that they may not be the only odd creatures there, I shall send a card to your friend Zinzan the miser, the plotter, or whatever he is."

A large party agreed to join them, and Lady Di made arrangements at a farm-house close to the well, which was esteemed as good for the complexion as May-dew, and at which drinkers were privileged to have a wish. The chosen day proved a radiant one, and the party set out early.

"More of those atrocious placards!" cried Lady Di, flourishing her fan towards a paper flapping from a wall. "The mob is getting too insolent; one cannot even go a-junketting without having those flaring bits of discontent thrust in one's face. They want the new canal stopped, forsooth, lest all the coal should be sent by it; I'd pitch 'em all into it if I were a magistrate."

When they reached their destination they found they were not the first to arrive, for as they drove up to the farm-house they saw a strange object hanging upon a window-sill, which proved to be the person of Mistress Biddy Trulow, who, regardless of silk stockings, Flanders lace, and Persian muslin, had scrambled up to the little wire-guarded opening, and inserting a straw which she had pulled out of the thatch, was quietly sucking up cream from a pan placed just within. Lady Di burst out a-laughing, and Camilla went up, and seizing the puny little thing, carried her off kicking and biting, and set her down in the porch with a shake.

"You little cat, how dare you steal the cream. I have a great mind to send you straight home again!" she said.

"The first chance I have I'll kill you, for a meddling, cantankerous toad!" screamed Biddy, and heaped as many more epithets upon Camilla as she could invent, until Camilla sent her flying out of the porch with a sound box on the ear. At the first opportunity she slipped an earwig down Cammy's back, which fully avenged the indignity she had suffered.

The party now assembled rapidly. Carriage after carriage drove up, and the yard swarmed with footmen. Biddy Trulow entertained herself by pestering Dolly. "La!" she exclaimed suddenly, "Why here, of all people, comes that grim Zinzan, with dear Cousin Will! I hope to goodness he has not brought the whey-faced parson and Madam Formality with him! Have you ever dined at their deadly, dull old house?"

"Yes, once."

"So did I, and I never mean to again. There was I, with my elbows where I always put them, on the table, and she—I thought she was going to have a fit! but oh dear no. 'Betty,' she cried, 'bring a pillow for this young lady's elbows.' Oh, how I did laugh. Then she said I was drinking too much wine, and ordered the butler to take away the bottle. 'Old scarecrow,' I said, 'if you lay a finger on it I'll turn it all over the table.' Mother said I was a giddy romp, and would have my own way, and madam said 'humph' like a pig."

Zinzan was there almost as much to his own astonishment as to that of any one else. Bernard had persuaded him, and Joliffe had taken him almost by force. The count being safe out of the way for the present, he said there was no use in his joining these people whom he disliked, and who disliked him; he said he should be a sort of death's-head at the

feast, and that no one would miss him if he stayed away. Joliffe professed to go on Patty's account, he wished to see how she would comport herself among Lady Di's intimates.

The one thought in Dolly's mind was, would Ludlow come, would he be heartless enough to parade his devotion to Mistress Belinda before her eyes, after she had sent him that little ring, of which he had taken no notice? He did come; Dolly knew he was there without looking, she heard his voice; that was enough to melt all her resentment. He did not speak to her; she had resolved not to exchange a word with him, but now she longed for him to come and talk, if it was for the last time.

They all waited some time for the duchess and Mistress Sturges; Lady Di sitting upon the doorstep, tossing for half-crowns; Ludlow standing by the duck-pond vexing the ducks with small stones and bits of stick. Zinzan and Joliffe took a stroll together, and Dolly listened to the chatter of Prissy and Patty, who had taken possession of her. At length Lady Di started to her feet, exclaiming—

"No more waiting, if it were for the princess herself; if the duchess and Mistress Belinda don't appear soon, they will find empty bottles and chicken bones very much at their service. So ho, ladies and gentlemen, let's off to the dairy."

The feast was arranged, and eaten with that simplicity which verges upon nastiness. Great pies and cakes, geese and fowls, syllabubs and junkets, apples and custards, heaped the long tables; but platters, knives, and forks were rare. Bottles stood in stacks, and tankards studded the board in plenty; the party could have stood a moderate siege without peril of starvation.

"Offended still, fair Phillida?" said a soft voice in Dolly's ear. She started violently, and could not answer for confusion. Ludlow took her hand, "Come, the nectar and ambrosia are served in the hall of the gods, and Hebe must sit by me."

Dolly forgot the ring, forgot Belinda, forgot the quarrel, forgot all her miseries, and went away with him in trembling joy.

Whenever Lady Di Buckler made up a party there were sure to be high jinks, and on this particular day she was in boisterous spirits, so that fun and revelry were soon at their height. The guests had come all that way on purpose to eat an uncomfortable dinner in a dairy with whitewashed

walls and a stone floor, so they were bound to enjoy it noisily ; and to eat and drink all the more, because plates were cracked and knives were few. Lady Di had ordered a band to attend, consisting of four men, who, stationed at one end of the long, low room, persistently deafened the ears and set on edge the teeth of all who were not making too much noise themselves to attend. Zinzan, whose amusement chiefly consisted in watching the others, placed himself next Dolly—not that he expected any of her attention—Ludlow being on the other side. Joliffe was devoting himself to the care of Mistress Meadowes, having declined Zinzan's suggestion of sitting next Mistress Patty. He preferred keeping an eye upon her from a distance. Mistress Trulow was Zinzan's other neighbour, and she kept him fully employed in filling her plate and glass, and listening to babbling praises of her daughter's amazing wit and spirit. If his eyes or his attention wandered they were instantly recalled by a nudge from an enormous elbow, or a rap on the knuckles with a heavy fan. She could not keep her personal decorations within bounds; for if her mind lacked breadth, her body did not ; and ribbons and bracelets strayed into Zinzan's plate, though he shifted it several times, for she seemed to expand as he tried to diminish. Presently Joliffe came to the rescue, and told a quantity of blood-curdling ghost stories. It was before the era of the Cock Lane story, so the implicit credulity with which Mistress Trulow listened was not to be wondered at.

"I saw you had had enough of the good lady," said Joliffe, afterwards, "so I rid you of the incubus with my stories."

"I was glad enough, and she relished being terrified prodigiously. She had well-nigh smothered me in the tapestry hangings in which she was arrayed."

Whatever were Sir Piers' private sentiments, he seemed as jovial as any one at the table. He was indeed relieved at the absence of Mistress Belinda ; but he had determined to brave it out, and not expose himself to the sneers of bitter-tongued little Bath, which had watched him paying his court to her so curiously. To Dolly he was more tender than he had been for some time ; she soothed his wounded vanity ; she listened to his whispers in a sort of rapture. Love, like sunshine, "showers down glory on the meanest things." Woe for those, like Dolly, who are deceived by the illusion! The god at whose shrine so much idol worship has been expended, rising from the sun-steeped southern seas, and dowered with the

rainbow of hope, draws man and maiden into his fairy ring, and shuts out the rest of the world into shivering darkness; but oh, when the spell is broken, and one is left alone to find that it is an idol that has been worshipped! Oh, woods and glens of sunny Greece, where the world's mischief-maker dropt the fatal juice on the eyes of a fairy queen, take back your truant, and spare poor mortal maidens the enchantment, the world's laughter, and the awakening!

Wine flowed, tankards clinked together, toasts were drunk, and so in the end—though women there were among them of high birth—were the greater part of that gallant company. When some hours had been consumed, a small party went merrily out to quaff at the well of St. Alphage, and wish a wish; but the majority stayed in, and pushing away dishes in wild confusion, produced packs of cards.

Out in the calm loveliness of an autumn evening, under the apple-trees, whose red and yellow spoils lay in heaps beneath them, came Dolly Chesney, hand in hand with Piers Ludlow, who called her his "little Dolly, his honey-sweet love, his goddess;" and the world was in a maze.

"Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will pledge with mine,
Or leave a kiss but in the cup,
And I'll not ask for wine."

He murmured the words, raising to her lips a leaf, with a few drops from the well.

"Tell me your wish, sweet Dolly."

"I cannot, I cannot; this day cannot last for ever, and that would be my wish."

Piers hastily dashed his hand into the water and drank.

"Money, money, money, Dolly! Let his saintship but give me a dip in Dame Fortune's bag, and we will trouble her for nothing more! And yet—the world is out of joint! cursed luck, 'tis all too late—never was such an unlucky wretch as Piers Ludlow."

There was a silence, and during it something crept between the two, a cloud—a shadow—a puff of smoke, a chill—yet a something! Dolly walked a few yards apart, and leant against a low wall, watching in a mist the golden sunset with feather sweeps of cloud across it. Ludlow folded his arms, and remained by the well. Zinzan, who had been out some time,

watched them with a curious interest. When Ludlow sauntered away with two or three more of the party, leaving Dolly, he went up to her. She turned quickly, and looked up at him with wistful eyes.

"Mr. Zinzan, I seem to see the old sundial's motto written in yonder broad band of yellow across the sky, 'The night cometh.' Oh—will it come, must it, does sorrow always come after joy?" She clasped her hands, and looked as if she hardly knew what she was saying.

"The mists are rising. Come out of this long grass, pray," said Zinzan. Dolly shivered, but did not move.

"Come," he repeated.

"Where?" she asked.

"Away from this place, you will make yourself ill."

"Well," said Dolly, "perhaps I might die then. But no, I don't think I should. I will go if you desire it."

She stood in the wet grass, mechanically gathering up her dress.

"I could walk on the wall better, if you will help me up," she said simply. It was done, and she sped over the rough stones, refusing to hold Zinzan's hand. Suddenly catching sight of Ludlow, she stopped short; and jumping down ran through the grass, as she thought away from him. But he having turned to meet her, caught and stopped her with a short laugh.

"Whither are you flying? Have you quarrelled with Zinzan, as you quarrelled with me?"

"I have not quarrelled with you to-day."

"Nay, but you may to-morrow. You are easily offended."

"Nay, I do not wish to quarrel."

"Not with Mr. Zinzan, perhaps."

"Or with any one. What have I done to vex you?"

"What am I to think? One day 'tis all the Frenchman, another day 'tis this Zinzan. What should bring the starched Puritan here, but that you cannot let even him alone? But I have no right to dictate to you, please yourself."

"Why are you so unkind! you know—you know——"

"I know, I suppose, that as one of your slaves, I ought to be grateful for any word or glance you deign to throw me. 'Tis well to know what women are, truly."

"I think you wish to quarrel with me, or you could not say such cruel

things. You may call Mr. Zinzan a starched Puritan, but he is always courteous and kind."

Piers was irritated; if Dolly had been meek, and tried to propitiate him more, he would not have been so unfeeling. If she had cried, he would have felt some remorse for the part he had been playing; but she was too sore at heart for tears, and he was desirous of breaking with her before he got into difficulties about her. He was angry at her praise of Zinzan, and thought she ought to be punished for it; and he assumed the jeering, bitter tone which always perplexed and distressed her. He laughed at the proceedings of the day, and said that Mistress Sturges had been wise to stay at home. Then they went into the orchard, where some of the party were having a game of romps, and separated. Soon Dolly was laughing and chattering in the midst of four or five admiring swains, under the spur of smarting pride and wounded affection. Zinzan leant against an apple-tree with folded arms, watching the figures running about in the dusk, but wondering if she too were after all heartless and vanity-sick as he had deemed all women lately.

By the time the games were finished, there was a general idea of returning home, but Lady Di insisted upon all assembling once more in the dairy, and drinking the wine. Some declincd, but more went back to the attack, and the soberer among the party were beginning to think anxiously of the drive home, especially as the servants were found to be one and all intoxicated. The horses were, however, put to the carriages, and the scattered groups, which requ:red a great deal of sorting, collected. Lady Di having bound over a few choice spirits to follow her, vowed that the frolic was not half over, and that she was going to Saltford to see the new locks by moonlight.

"We must follow them," said Zinzan to Captain Joliffe. "The postillions and footmen are drunk, and these fellows little better. The roads are not safe; a coach was stopped at Claverton last week, and another at Keynsham."

Joliffe agreed at once, and the two mounted their horses. Lady Di's, Lady Blunt's, and Sir Piers Ludlow's carriages, all well filled, rolled along at full speed, swaying from side to side, while several of their occupants sang glees and catches without any especial regard to time or tune. They drove straight across country, over hedge and ditch, and splashing through brooks. It was much too dark to see their way; and after losing it several

times, they at length emerged safely into the high road, after having been, as Sir Piers said, shaken like dice in a box. Dolly never forgot that blind, headlong race; she was not afraid, the worst had come to the worst when she had quarrelled a second time with Piers. Camilla was in mad spirits, which rose the higher as they tore along the faster. Lady Blunt was becoming peevishly frightened and scolding Mr. Simmonds. They clattered into the little village of Saltford, bringing some of the inhabitants to the windows with chattering teeth and half-opened eyes. From one cottage alone streamed a light. Lady Di shouted to "pull up," and they all tumbled out. Declaring that she did not intend going home without supper, she rapped loudly at the door, which was presently opened by a woman of masculine stature, and forbidding countenance, who tried to throw a glimmer upon her unexpected visitors from the rushlight she held in her hand.

"Belated travellers, good madam," said Sir Piers, stepping forward.

"You have a fire yonder, my good woman," cried Lady Di, pushing in.

"Ay! but my house be no inn," was the reply.

Sir Piers held up his purse, and no further objection was made. The woman ushered them sullenly into her kitchen, and kicked away two cats who were lying in the ashes on the hearth.

"We are come to see the new locks, and must eat a bit of supper, till the moon is up," said Lady Di.

"You be come in time. I hope you may be pleased."

They rather wondered at so gracious an answer, though it was spoken in a disagreeable manner. The fire was now vigorously poked up, and the energetic leader dispatched the footmen for the baskets from the carriages. Stripping off bracelets and mittens, and making Cammy pin up her sleeves, she promised them the rarest "devil" they had ever tasted as a finish to the evening.

"Come, my good soul," she said to the morose hostess, "reach me your gridiron; bustle about, Cammy, and find me mustard and pepper. You, Ludlow, hand me those chickens. Open the bottles, fellows, and you lazy girls set the table. We shall have a hot supper in a twinkling."

Zinzan and Joliffe saw through the cottage window Lady Di's orders being carried into effect. She herself was standing gridiron in hand; her gown, which was covered with gold spots as though it had been dipped into the mint and come out all over guineas, was pinned back, and she

had tied her handkerchief over her head; a cat sat on either side of her, watching her actions with gloomy suspicion. Lady Blunt, holding her petticoats off the floor, was, with the assistance of Mr. Simmonds, carrying a small battered salt-box to the table. Camilla, in all her rouge, patches, and finery, was setting out all the wooden and delft platters she could find. Sir Piers was brewing punch, and the rest standing about in each other's way. As there were not half enough chairs, some took their plates to the settle, and some sat upon the table; and there they sang and laughed and rioted for nearly an hour, smashed all the willow-patterned plates, and paid for them ten times over; then swarmed out at length to their carriages, leaving a fine gleaning for their hostess. Poor Dolly had got away into a corner out of sight, miserable, frightened, and ashamed, wishing she had never seen any of them and never left Spincourt, yet still finding something princely in Ludlow's behaviour, which made him quite different from the others. She was glad the Meadowes' had gone home quietly; she would not have any of her country friends see Lady Di's pranks, particularly as they would remember how little their own rough sports and merriment had been to her taste. She was thankful to obey the summons to depart, and to find herself in the carriage again. Lady Di forgot one of her gold bracelets, and Mr. Simmonds his snuff-box set with "turkis," and they were never heard of again. And now, as they rattled through the village, the hunter's moon had risen full, and was shining down upon the country a glorious saffron colour. Zinzan and Joliffe observed one or two dark objects under the wall as they rode along; men were trampling up the road with hasty steps, and at a short distance strange crashing sounds came upon the still air. It was clear that some unusual disturbance was taking place, and Zinzan reining up his horse by the side of Lady Di's carriage, besought her to wait while he went on to ascertain that the road was safe. But she was far too excited to listen.

"Good lack, Mr. Zinzan; how came you here? did you sup with us? Out of my way, I want to see what's adoing!" and away they went, the postillions shouting and cracking their whips, until their progress was suddenly arrested. The Avon came in sight, its newly-made locks lying calm in the moonlight, and a dense black mass of some three hundred colliers were gathered round the locks working with pick, and saw, and hammer to break them up before morning. Mighty blows descended from the grimy muscular arms, the massive posts and doors

were beginning to tremble and give, while the pent-up water was issuing through in quick gurgling streamlets. The threatening placards about the town had meant mischief, and the coal-drivers had met to destroy the work which they looked upon as the ruin of their trade. True enough the day which saw the barges first afloat on the canal was the last that saw the coal from the Mendip mines conveyed by road, and the conservatism of the mob was aroused. There is no conservatism like that; every new invention to save life or labour is a witness to it—spinning-jennies, jacquard looms, steam machinery of all kinds.

Directly the three carriages rolled round the corner of the road, those of the rioters who had not yet reached the locks, and others who were on the watch, rushed forward, and swarmed over them like bees from an over-turned hive. They knocked down the tipsy footmen, swept the postillions from their saddles, and unharnessed the horses, amid shouts and shrieks from the occupants of the vehicles. In a few seconds they were all out and standing in the centre of a ring of veritable blackguards, wondering what would happen next. Lady Blunt calling wildly upon the faithful Simmonds, fell flat upon the ground in a swoon, hysterics being not yet invented. Lady Di insisted with many threats upon not being immediately murdered, but finding no steps taken towards such a catastrophe, began rather to enjoy the joke, and to try her powers of persuasion upon the stolid men of Somersetshire mines. Camilla, who never wanted for courage, turned perfectly white with rage. Dolly's Chesney and Bellingham blood overcame her constitutional timidity, and she preserved an apparent calmness. Mr. Simmonds was glancing furtively round, in hopes of an opportunity of showing the white feather in flight. They were all huddled together like sheep in a pen, closely eyed by their dangerous-looking guard, and especially when a stray moonbeam caught the lustre of a brilliant or the gleam of gold.

"There is nothing for it but ransom," said Zinzan, "get the ladies away as soon as possible."

Ludlow was setting his teeth in fury, and longing to pay with his fists or his sword.

Then out spake brawny, coal-heaving Somerset, in broadest vernacular—

"If so be as you gentry bide quiet here till we ha' done our job, why no harm done, and, mebbe, you'll coome doown handsome wi' your bra-ad pieces—eh, mates?"

There was a murmur or growl of assent.

One of the gentlemen incautiously jerked out his purse, through the meshes of which glittered golden guineas. At the sight, there was an immediate movement in the crowd; outsiders, fearing that they might be overlooked, pressed forward, a general clamour began, and threats were uttered. Zinzan knocked one or two back, and picking up Lady Blunt's prostrate form, carried her unmolested to her coach, and left her in charge of Mr. Simmonds, who held a vinaigrette to her nose, and trembling with terror, shut the coach door, and crouched down in hopes of escaping further notice. The other gentlemen, having retained small command over themselves since their late convivialities, commenced hitting out among the black faces and smocks crowding upon them, and forgot the ladies, whose situation was becoming more and more unpleasant in the midst of the excited mob. Meanwhile, the blows fell thick and fast upon the lock-gates; water-spouts were finding more frequent outlets; pieces of wood floated out into the disturbed river; there was a last rending convulsion, the gates parted and fell, and were instantly carried away by a black, rushing mass of water, bursting from a height of eighteen feet. The loud crash, and the roar which followed from the rioters, completed the confusion. All were mingled in a struggling, shouting mass, which surged nearer and nearer the bank of the canal, muddy and down-trodden by hundreds of heavy feet. The coal-heavers as they saw this retreated, but hustled on their prisoners. The flow was abating, the waters rapidly diminishing in their channel; the moon shone down upon the senseless, wicked ruin, and upon angry, frightened faces. When the fighting began, Camilla and Dolly took refuge under Ludlow's stalwart protection; Lady Di was poking her strong-handled fan vigorously into the begrimed enemy, inflicting many a bruise, before it broke. As they got upon the bank there was a momentary lull, and the gentlemen made one strenuous effort to rescue their helpless companions. Ludlow passed his arm round Dolly, intending to lift her up, and make a way through if possible, when Camilla, breaking from Captain Joliffe's hold, threw herself between them, with flaming eyes, and inserting her strong, supple fingers into Dolly's waist-belt, pushed her head foremost into the river. A few minutes before, and Dolly would have stood small chance of escaping with life from amidst a boiling flood, and a wreck of jagged masses of wood, but the worst was

over when she was hurled suddenly down between the gloomy walls. Through the confusion and horror of that moment rang a shriek, "Ludlow, Ludlow, Ludlow!" in her ears; afterwards she thought she must have imagined it. She was being swept away into the river when Ludlow and Zinzan jumped into the water at the same moment, and clutched at her struggling, sinking, gasping figure. They lifted her out of the dark, the cold, the mysterious flood, and laid her on the bank all streaming and semi-conscious.

"Are you dead, my love?" cried Lady Di. "Why on earth did you do such a silly thing? Bless me, don't bring her near me with her wet clothes; I'm mighty glad you ain't drowned, child!"

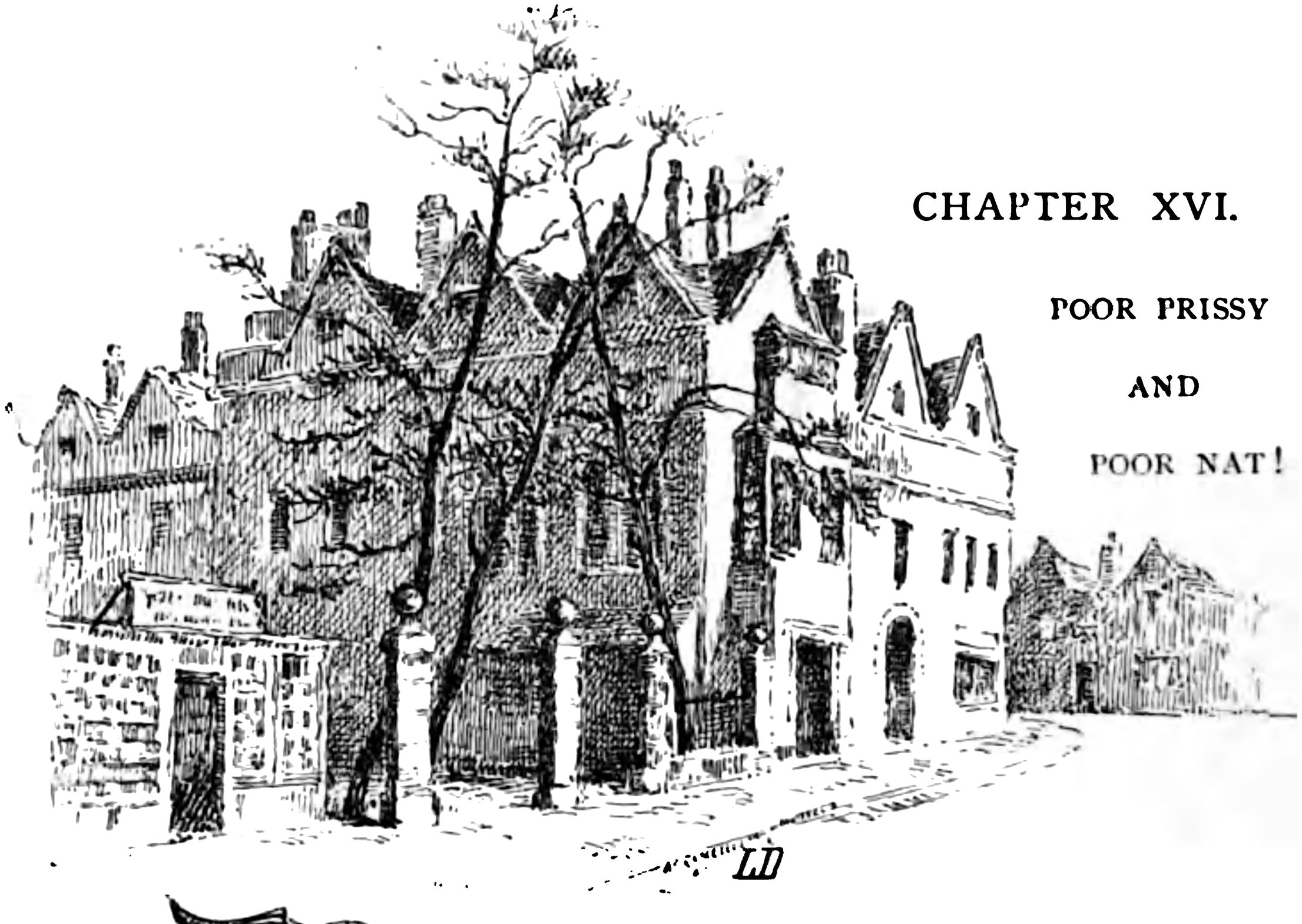
Dolly was dizzy and bewildered, and did not know where she was, until she found herself lying warm and dry on a little hard pallet in the cottage in which they had supped. But that strange, agonized cry, "Ludlow, Ludlow, Ludlow!" in Cammy's voice, was the perplexing refrain to all her mazy thoughts during the time she lay there. The colliers had scattered when she fell into the canal, and their attention had been distracted. The others saw that it was the moment for their escape. They broke through the thinned group, and made their way into the village, Ludlow and Joliffe guarding the retreat, and dealing guineas and blows as occasion served. Shivering, ill-tempered, and miserable, the unlucky gipsying party lingered in the little kitchen which had been the scene of their late revels. Lady Di, after laughing boisterously at every one, had fallen asleep with her wig awry, her rouge run into wrong places, her face smeared with coal-dust, one high-heeled shoe gone, and her lace apron torn to tatters. Lady Blunt was weeping profusely, over a broken fan and vanished comfit-box; Mr. Simmonds was gazing with lack-lustre eyes at his torn lace ruffles, from which his jewelled studs had disappeared; and Camilla was offering to wring out Lady Blunt's tear-steeped handkerchief. Mr. Simmonds, who sometimes seemed to forget that he was not one of the fair sex, was the only gentleman present, the others having disposed of themselves elsewhere; and so the hours of midnight dragged tediously by until three o'clock, when the rioters having fairly dispersed, and liberated the horses, they were put to the carriage again.

"I promised you a rare frolic, and I think you've had it!" cried Lady Di. "But, on my life, I did not bargain to leave my gold bracelets, and

my di'mond ring behind, as well as my purse. Some blackguard gentleman pulled the ring off my finger in the hurley burley, as a souvenir."

"The ruffians shall smart for this, I promise them," exclaimed Ludlow.

In the chill gray of early dawn, the remains of the party, that had set out so bravely in the morning, dragged wearily up the stairs of their respective houses, and laid aching heads on pillows which had never before seemed so downy.



CHAPTER XVI.

POOR PRISSY AND POOR NAT!

DOLLY awoke the next morning tired and aching; but with a restless desire to escape from her own reflections, which made her hurry over her solitary breakfast, and go out earlier than usual to visit her mother. Coming back under the protection of her maid Sally, she met Mr. Nat Meadowes hurrying along Westgate Street.

"Oh, Mistress Dolly!" he cried, stopping her and seizing her hands; "we heard you were drowned."

"I had a tumble into the water, but I am none the worse for it, Mr. Nat," said Dolly.

"One said you were drowned, and another that you were alive, but not expected to live; and oh, Mistress Dolly!——"

Poor Nat's feelings overcame him, and he did not finish his speech.

"Have you been to inquire after me, Mr. Nat? Indeed, I thank you extremely for your solicitude."

"Prissy, Patty, and Dulcy are all bemoaning you, Mistress Dolly; won't you come and show them that you are well?"

"I think I might. I do not expect to see Lady Di yet awhile, after the fatigues of last night. I am grieved to have occasioned so much distress, and shall be happy to see your sisters."

"You'll find them all in a sad taking," said Nat, gloomily. "Maybe, if you were to speak a word to Prissy she might come to reason."

"Why, what is the matter, Mr. Nat?"

"You will hear fast enough, Mistress Dolly. 'Tis a fine to do, and I was glad to get away from it. There's the squire in a pretty passion, and I am going to call out Captain Joliffe."

Dolly looked aghast.

"Captain Joliffe, who was your guest a few days since? Captain Joliffe, who was good friends with you all but yesterday! What can you mean?"

"I'm but dull at telling a story, Mistress Dolly, and maybe the others would be put out, if I was beforehand with them. What did the man mean by giving the biggest, reddest apple to Prissy, when it was Patty he meant? I'm sure, Mistress Dolly, I always gave you the best."

"There was no occasion for it then, Mr. Nat," said Dolly hastily.

"Who is to tell what a man means, when he is so double-faced and false? I never made any pretence, now did I, Mistress Dolly?"

"I do not know what you mean. I never noticed if you did not."

"But you understand me, now, don't you, Mistress Dolly? You don't fancy these velvet-coated milksops, now, do you? You are not a silly patch, like my sisters."

"It will not please me that you should speak ill of your sisters, Mr. Nat, but I know that you are a very kind brother to them."

"I hope I am, and I am so happy you consider me kind and well-meaning, Mistress Dolly, for——"

At this moment they reached the Meadowes' lodgings, and, the door flying open, out burst the squire, with his low-crowned hat clapped hastily over his eyes, and a long gold-headed cane in his hand.

"Bless my heart, Dolly Chesney, is that you. Not drowned then? I'm glad of it; no truth in anything one hears in this famous city of yours! I'll take them all back, I will, when I've caned that rascal. Go in, go in, you will find 'em all swooning, and crying together."

Dolly seized his arm. "Dear squire, pray, before you cane any one, find out if there be not some mistake. Will you not go and speak to Mr. Zinzan?"

"No, no, no; the rascals are in league. I'll be even with 'em. I'll cane the pair of 'em."

"Mr. Nat!" exclaimed Dolly, "pray go with your father, I fear there may be mischief. Persuade him to seek Mr. Zinzan," and, seeing he hesitated, she pushed him away from the door, shut it, and ran up-stairs. In the parlour she found Mrs. Meadowes, Patty, and Dulcy sitting round on chairs against the wall, weeping profusely. They screamed when they put down their aprons and saw her. She stood in the doorway, looking at them in dismay.

"What has happened? Where is Prissy?"

No answer, but fresh sobs and tears; at last Dulcy gasped out, "Prissy's in her chamber, she—she won't come down; she's ate nothing but a slice of bread-and-butter for breakfast."

"Two slices!" sobbed Mrs. Meadowes. "Oh, dear Mistress Dolly, how glad I am to see you alive after your drowning; though what I'm to do I'm sure I can't tell. Can't you speak to Prissy and tell her the apple was all a mistake, and she had best not take on about it."

"No!" exclaimed Patty, tearfully; "tell her that I was the mistake, and that I knew nothing at all about it. I wouldn't make mischief, no, not for the world, and see poor Prissy so unhappy! Only, Dolly, it has all come out, the broken sixpence, and the ash-trees, and all."

"You puzzle me so, all of you, I don't know what to make of it. Pray tell me, Patty, what has really happened?"

"It is all Captain Joliffe's fault. I'm sure I never thought of his wanting to marry me; and Prissy said she thought his sky-blue uniform the prettiest she had ever seen; and then when he gave her the finest, rosiest apple, yesterday at the gipsying party, of course we both thought 'twas Prissy he was courting. Why, he never so much as spoke to me, and now, early this morning, comes a letter to father to ask me in marriage; and so, so of course, I told all about George Colthorp, and how, as you know, Dolly, he broke a sixpence with me before he sailed to sea; and he cut great P's on the trees, and father couldn't think who had done it. And, I will marry him, or no one, if he comes home without arms or legs, and as poor, as poor; and there's an end of it!"

"But what of Prissy?"

"Poor dear," sighed Mrs. Meadowes. "He is a very treacherous young man, Mistress Dolly. Prissy was so taken with the silver cord on his blue coat. The poor child has done nothing but cry this whole morning. What did he come here for, making such mischief? I wish you would speak to poor Prissy, dear Mistress Dolly, she might be the better for seeing you, and hearing you say that she had been very ill-used."

"Shall I go up to her, Mrs. Meadowes?"

"No, my dear, I think I will; and, Patty, come with me, and then you can fetch Mistress Dolly, if Prissy wishes to see her; maybe she may like to wash her face in elder-flower water first."

The two left the room, and Dolly was left with Dulcy.

"Don't you think you had better stop crying, Dulcy?" she said.

"But every one thinks of Prissy. I've been very ill-used too," sobbed Dulcy. "I am sure Sir Piers Ludlow made quite as much of me as Captain Joliffe did of Prissy. Mrs. Biddy Trulow told me that he said I had a very neat ankle, and that sure he must have fallen in love with me, and it is high time I should think of marrying; for I was seventeen last May, as you know, Dolly, and if I married Sir Piers, I should be my lady, and come to Bath every season; and now father says he will carry us all home to-morrow along of Patty, and I shall never see Sir Piers Ludlow any more, and he said I had a neat ankle, Dolly."

"I think you had best think no more of that gentleman, Dulcy, and I wonder at you for crying about it, when you have scarce spoken to him."

"I suppose that wouldn't prevent his falling in love with me; I'm sure Captain Joliffe scarce spoke to Patty. I mayn't be as pretty to your mind as Prissy, Mistress Dolly, but Prissy's ankles are thick."

"Do dry your eyes, Dulcy. I did not think you had been so silly; I hear Patty calling me, so I must go up-stairs."

"I'm sure I have made myself quite as sick as Prissy with crying, and you all run after her. I take it very unkind."

But Dolly would listen to her no longer. She ran up-stairs and found Prissy recovering from her affliction and drinking a basin of broth, while Mrs. Meadowes stood over her and saw that she took it to the last drop.

"Oh, Dolly!" she exclaimed, when she saw her friend; "we are a very unlucky family."

"I am sure I am very sorry," said Dolly. "But I wouldn't trouble about it any more if I were you, Prissy."

"But I was so deceived! To be led out to dance first, Dolly; and then to see him pretend a preference for me, Dolly! oh, I never was so taken with any one before; and then to think he could be so false! I do think Patty might have known better. I made sure at first that he had mistook our names in the letter, but father said 'twas not possible. Dolly, don't you think Patty was sly about it?"

"Oh fie, Prissy, how can you say so!" cried Patty, reproachfully. "You know I wish father to tell him he has made a mistake, and had best marry Prissy; and every one knows she is the pretty one."

"No; I won't have anything to say to him now," exclaimed Prissy, "since he has treated me so ill."

"Then I should not fret about it any more," said Dolly.

"Quite true, dear Mistress Dolly," said Mrs. Meadowes. "Just what I tell them; and I am sure the squire will never hear of Patty's marrying George Colthorp; and as for Prissy, I've known two young girls pine away and die just for the same sort of thing. One took a consumption—and I'm almost sure a young gentleman was courting her; and the other got the small-pox, and I don't think he ever thought of her more than Captain Joliffe did of Prissy."

"I'm very like to take a consumption, Dolly," said Prissy, mournfully. "I should like you to have my Indian chain, since you fancy it, dear."

At this instant came a loud rap at the door, and the squire entered. "You had better see that there is something to eat in this abominable place, Mrs. Meadowes, for I have asked Captain Joliffe and Mr. Zinzan to step in to dinner."

His words fell like a thunderbolt among them. Prissy shrieked and renewed her tears.

"My dear Mr. Meadowes!" cried his wife. "And you so angered against the young man as you were!"

"Pooh, pooh, more fool I for listening to a pack of silly women. Dry your eyes, Prissy, and make yourself smart; who knows, he may think better of it yet."

"It's very unkind to make a jest of it," sobbed Prissy.

"Come, you have nothing more to cry about," said the squire firmly. "The man did not intend mischief; he gave me a very handsome explan-

ation, and he is a very gentlemanlike fellow, whom it's a mercy to meet with in a place like this. So I won't have the house turned upside down any longer with women's tantrums. But mark me, Patty," he continued, shaking his stick at that damsel, "If I hear anything more of George Colthorp, I'll cut you off with a shilling. Colthorp, forsooth! when we've been at feud with the family for three generations! Do you suppose it's to be made up all of a sudden, to please a couple of chits?"

"Dolly," whispered Patty, throwing her arms round her friend, and beaming through her tears, "I believe father will give his consent after all."

"What! after what he has just said?"

"Ah, you don't know father as well as I do; all that means nothing."

"I'm sure I shall be heartily glad, dear Patty."

Prissy, after sitting for a few moments in meditation, rose with a sigh; said, doubtless father would be displeased if she did not come down for dinner, and proceeded to follow her mother's advice of bathing her face in elder-flower water. Mr. Nat was despatched to ask Lady Di's leave for Dolly to stay to dinner, and at one o'clock in came Captain Joliffe and Zinzan. Prissy and Patty blushed very red when they curtsied to the former, and did not open their lips to speak once during dinner. After dinner they all collected in the parlour, which was inconveniently small for so large a party, and there was a considerable degree of awkwardness among them. The three sisters were speechless and shy, not knowing where to look, sitting on stiff chairs close together, and close to Dolly, and holding hands as though to protect themselves against a mutual enemy; Mrs. Meadowes tried to talk to Captain Joliffe, but her attention wandered to the bevy of girls across the room. Nat knocked against the table, stumbled over the andirons, and upset Dulcy's work-box, and stared at Dolly whenever he thought he was unobserved. At last it was suggested that they should all go out and walk in the ring, and every one was delighted to take advantage of the proposal. Dolly found herself promenading the gravel walk with Nat and Dulcy. Dulcy had regained her equanimity, and was pleased to watch the coaches and the equestrians as they passed by, though she did not forget to say, every two minutes, "I wonder if Sir Piers rides to-day," or, "None of these fine gentlemen look so grand as Sir Piers."

Nat proposed that they should sit down awhile upon a seat unde

some trees. Dolly was content to do so. She did not feel inclined to talk to any of her Bath acquaintances; the society of chattering, unconscious Dulcy, and dull, amiable Nat, suited her best at that moment.

"Dulcy," said Nat, "wouldn't you prefer walking; you will see more of the fine folks than sitting here out of the way."

"No, thank you, Nat dear," answered Dulcy cheerfully. "Unless you and Dolly wish to walk; I am very well content."

"Maybe mother will want you, Dulcy."

"Oh! no, indeed, I am sure she will not; and 'tis seldom I get speech with dear Dolly."

Nat relapsed into silence until Dulcy began counting the blue coats, the white hats, and so on, when he said in a low, and somewhat hoarse voice, "Mistress Dolly?"

"Yes, Mr. Nat."

"Mistress Dolly, I am so pleased you are not crazed after the fine folk, like my sisters."

Dolly smiled, and waited for his next remark.

"Mistress Dolly?"

"Yes, Mr. Nat."

"Would you advise me to get a suit of clothes made in Bath? Father don't wish it."

"Then I should not, if I were you."

"But if you'd rather I did, you know——"

"I assure you I care nothing about it."

"Because you've only to hint it."

"Really, I think you had better consult your sisters."

"That would not do at all! 'tis your taste I care about. Mistress Dolly?"

"Yes, Mr. Nat."

"You couldn't walk in those shoes now through Ploughman's Lane."

"No, indeed; but I should not wear them there."

"I am so happy; do you know you please me extraordinarily by saying that. Mistress Dolly?"

"Yes, Mr. Nat."

"I'm half afraid you think the worse of me for not being so fine and smooth-tongued as your Bath beaux."

"No, indeed, Mr. Nat; you would not be yourself if you were."

"Oh! you don't think I should be," said Nat, brightening up. "Mistress Dolly?"

"Yes, Mr. Nat."

"You know I wish, sometimes, I was a bit more like them; then, maybe, I should know how to turn a pretty speech which you wouldn't laugh at. I'm only a plain man."

"Oh, Dolly!" cried Dulcy, "do look at Mr. Nash's coach; 'tis finer than the princess's."

"You know I see it every day, Dulcy."

"So do I, but look at Lady Blunt in a cinnamon petticoat and a flowered sack. How happy she is, to be able to wear so many smart clothes."

"Mistress Dolly?" said Nat, once more.

"Yes, Mr. Nat."

"Could you tell me, now, what you would suppose one of your fine bucks would say if he wanted to tell a lady that he was her true lover, and that he would be very happy if she would marry him?"

"Dear me, Mr. Nat, what a strange question. I dare say, if he was a silly fop, he would make a long speech, and tell her she was a goddess, but if he was a sensible man, he would say, 'Madam, will you marry me?'"

"Then, Mrs. Dolly," exclaimed Nat, hurriedly, becoming pale with alarm at his own temerity, "let me say it to you. Will you marry me?"

"La, Nat! what can you be telling Dolly, to make you both look scared as if you had seen a bogie?" cried Dulcy, turning her attention to her companions at this inopportune moment.

Nat and Dolly recoiled from one another. Dolly rose.

"Come, Dulcy, I am sure we ought to seek our friends," she said, leading the way.

Just before they reached Mrs. Meadowes, Patty and Zinzan, who were together, Nat pulled Dolly's sleeve, and whispered, "Pray, pray, give me an answer. I'm terrible earnest, I assure you."

"Never, Mr. Nat, never. I'm very sorry; and please say no more about it," Dolly answered quickly.

Nat seized his hat from under his arm, and forgetful of fashion, crushed it down upon his head, and strode away at a pace which attracted no small attention from the groups scattered about the promenade. Dolly felt very guilty as she joined her friends, and sure that Mr. and Mrs. Meadowes

would be highly displeased if they were to learn what had passed. She was sorry for her old playfellow, and did him the justice to think him a very honest fellow; but all her reflections ended in a deep sigh, the meaning of which was very vague to her.

"Dolly," said Dulcy, "just step behind, I have a notion I want to tell you of."

"Well, Dulcy, what is it?"

"Why, I think Mr. Zinzan will marry Patty, they have been walking together the whole afternoon, and they seem mighty taken with one another. I do hope my sisters will marry before we leave Bath. I should love to be an only daughter like you, Dolly."

"I am sure you need not wish it; but I am glad you have got the better of your trouble this forenoon, Dulcy."

"Yes, it was just Prissy's crying set me on; but I'm in no hurry to marry, we have very good fun at home, and I should dearly like having everything my own way there for a time. After all, Sir Piers Ludlow is too high and mighty for me, he would not love a romp as I do."

"It would be pleasant if dear Patty were to marry Mr. Zinzan, if she did not deem him too old, and grave; for he is so kind, and true. I hope you may be right, Dulcy."

"He might do for Patty, but he wouldn't for me—I am hugely frightened of him."

"I was at first, but I learnt very soon what a good friend he could be; and I should like to see some one happy."

"La, Dolly, that is not very uncommon! There are plenty of happy people. You and Sir Piers Ludlow, and Nat, have everything you want; I should say Prissy and Patty, but things vex Prissy sometimes, and Patty cries because George Colthorp is away at sea; and father scolds if we want new hats or gowns, at times, and grumbles if we want to go out to a merry-making in the winter, because of the horses; and mother fidgets over the sewing and the preserves."

"For all that, Dulcy, I reckon you the happiest family I know, for you all love one another dearly, and there are no secrets in your house."

"La, Dolly, how should there be? Except indeed father never knew George Colthorp broke a sixpence with Patty, and cut her name upon the trees."

They were now standing at the door of their lodgings. Prissy seized Dolly's hand and said, "You will come in to tea, won't you, Dolly?"

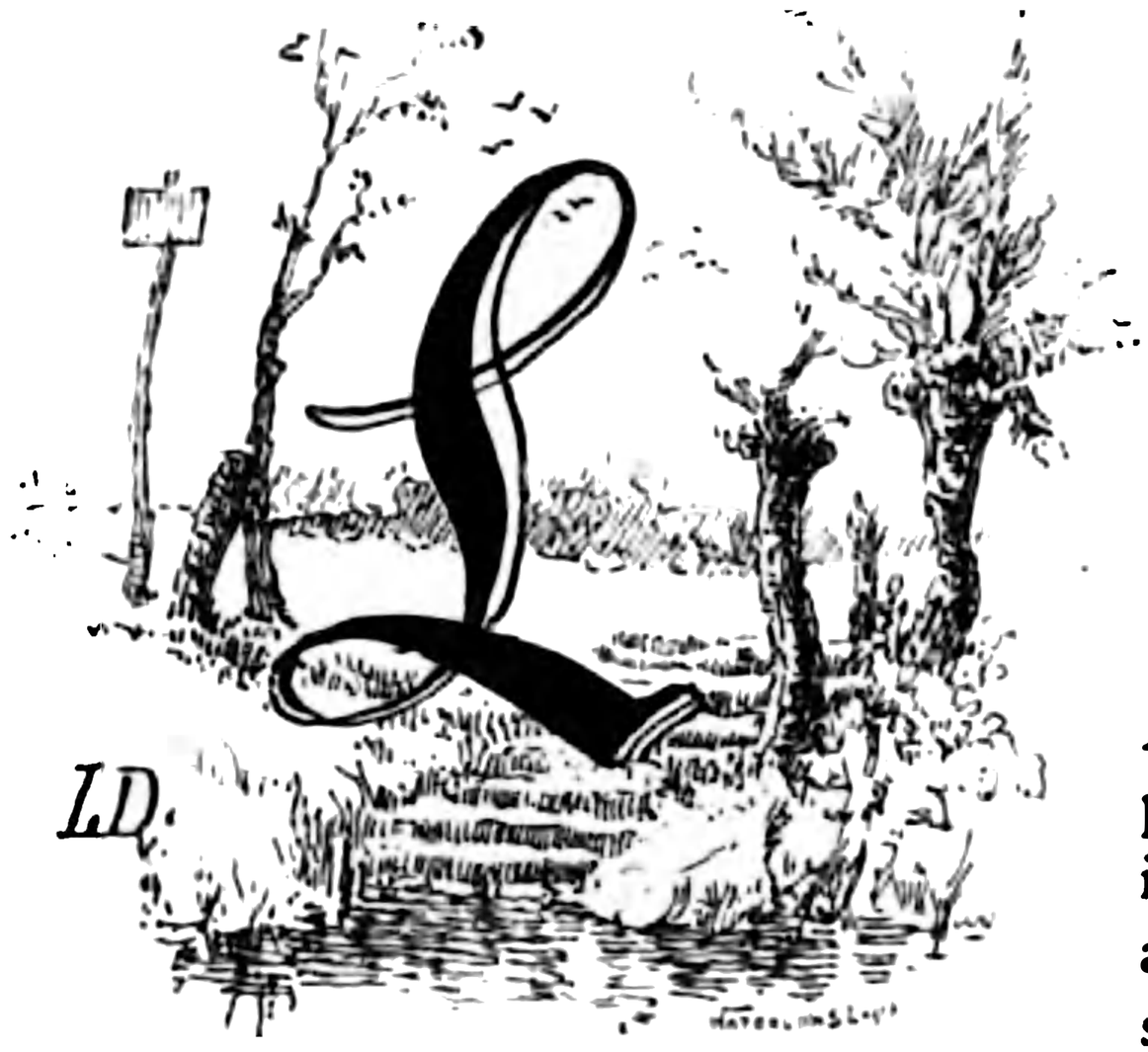
She was looking blooming and radiant; there was not a trace left of the storm of the morning.

"You are the better for your walk, Prissy," Dolly said. Prissy blushed, and laughed. "I cannot come in now, for I am going to a rout at Lady Blunt's to-night, and Lady Di will be vexed if I am out any longer, so farewell."

"But, Dolly dear," Prissy whispered, "just come in for ten minutes, I have something to say to you, and Nat will be proud to see you home."

"Nay, Prissy, you must write, or come to me to-morrow, for I cannot stay; and I will not trouble Mr. Nat, for Mr. Zinzan says he will be at the pains of seeing me home."

"Then I will see you early to-morrow; maybe it will be better—but I'll say no more."



CHAPTER XVII.

SIMMONDS' DUEL.

LADY BLUNT'S rout was not a particularly brilliant one; it took its tone, as usual, from the hostess, and was all splendid dress, wearisomeness and vapidity. The rooms were overcrowded, and the guests spiritless. Mischief-making was rife, everything else fell heavily. Dolly looked for Ludlow, and did not see him; Camilla sought for M. de Bressy, and he, too, was absent.

"What can have happened to your faithful swain?" she said to Dolly. "He has been invisible of late."

"If you mean M. de Bressy, he has sprained his ankle, I am told," said Dolly coldly.

"Well, I know not how it is, but 'tis monstrous dull to-night; I have yawned half a dozen times. Lady Blunt looks more peevish and dieaway than ever, and does not know how to manage her guests. No one can get at their friends, 'tis all so ill-arranged. Simmonds alone looks pleased; he will never shut his mouth again if he opens it so wide. What a marvellous fool the creature is, with his green, gooseberry eyes; he follows Lady Blunt like a lackey. I wonder if she will take him, after all; I don't see why she should, for her fortune is immense."

"She is not very amiable to him, poor thing! I have seen her treat him, as she might a dog; not half so well, indeed, as she treats her pet spaniels."

"Good enough for him. I wonder when some one will ask me to play cards; I am dying for a game. I shall win to-night, I am convinced of it; Smith has promised me famous luck."

Lady Blunt was complaining to every one about the defection of Sir Piers, and asking if he had been seen anywhere. The princess had promised to look in upon her; possibly he might be in attendance on her; if so, 'twas unreasonable and uncivil, for he had engaged to come early. Her ladyship was in a very fretful temper; poor Simmonds, who would have declared the moon to be usually blue to please her, had to endure many a taunt and rebuff, even while she sent him flying on messages and errands the whole evening.

"Oh, Simmonds!" she said, "how provoking you are, always out of the way when you are wanted; and you have caught my train twice to-night with your sword, you awkward creature! You must go to Sir Piers' lodgings and seek him."

Simmonds looked very sulky, and made no answer.

"Make all the haste you can," continued Lady Blunt, peevishly. "I don't know why you stand gaping there."

"I—I—suppose he will come if he intends it," stammered Simmonds.

"I suppose that does not mean that you will not do my bidding, sir?"

"Oh, no; your ladyship knows you may command me always. But——"

"Then go, this instant!" said Lady Blunt, stamping her foot. "I am tired of you to-night."

Mr. Simmonds went with a very bad grace, and did not hurry himself. He found that Ludlow was not at his lodgings, and followed him to Harrison's Rooms, where he was induced to stay, and watch the play, and pay for the supper. He hoped Lady Blunt might feel some regret on finding that he did not return. Ludlow made his appearance with the princess's suite, and Lady Blunt would scarcely suffer him to leave her side for a moment. He had, therefore, no opportunity of speaking to Dolly, who was thus left in miserable uncertainty whether he was willing to make up the quarrel at St. Alphage's Well, or if he was irretrievably offended. That quarrel, she felt sure, was only due to a misunderstanding; doubtless all would be well, if she could only convince him that his suspicions of Zinzan and the Count were completely groundless. He bowed, and smiled to her; her heart leaped up; he did not look unforgiving; but that was all that evening, until just as she was leaving, when he suddenly appeared at her side, and bending down until his cheek brushed the feathers in her hair, said—

"Are you going to the next assembly, Mistress Dolly?"

"Yes, yes," was all she could say.

"We shall meet there; we are friends, are we not?"

There were tears in poor Dolly's eyes, when she tried to answer, and Ludlow saw them. He put her into her chair in silence, and strolled back to Harrison's Rooms, musing bitterly.

Mr. Simmonds' one act of rebellion proved most unlucky for him, though he was destined to be a more notable character from the date of it than he had ever been before. Between twelve and one that night, he was seen standing in High Street slashing valiantly with his rapier at the carcase of a pig suspended in front of a pork-butcher's stall, and swearing that no gentleman should insult him with impunity, that if the fellow would not make way, he should rue his insolence. Next morning the mangled carcase was conveyed to his lodgings with the bill skewered to it, and Bath was ringing with the story of Mr. Simmonds' duel. When in desperation he rushed to fling himself at the feet of Lady Blunt, hoping to be beforehand with the report, he was assured in a cold and pettish manner that she could never consent to marry a man of whom it would always be said he had fought a duel with a dead pig. He need make no alteration in his behaviour to her, but must never again presume upon her condescension.

At the same hour Prissy had hurried off to Kingsmead Square, escorted by brother Nat, who walked up and down waiting for her, while she was closeted with Dolly.

"Well, Prissy, what is your news?" Dolly asked.

Prissy threw her arms round her, and kissed her a dozen times before she answered. "Dolly," she said at length, "I am a very happy girl."

"I am happy to hear you say so, Prissy."

"And, Dolly, I was right after all; it would have been a sin and a shame for Patty to have married him, and poor George Colthorp far away at sea; drowned, very like, or eaten up by savages. Dolly, you know I walked with him all yesterday afternoon, and he found 'twas all a mistake, and father don't object much; he says 'tis his fault for bringing us here, and Patty is so pleased. I'm sure I would not for the world harm or vex dear Patty, nor she me; and so after all, dear Dolly, I shall be married first, though you have been so long in Bath; and I did cry so when you went away; and I ought to be, because I am older, you know."

"So you are going to marry Captain Joliffe, then, Prissy; well, if you are all pleased, I am, and I wish you very happy indeed."

"And Patty thinks father will not be very angry about George Colthorp, so long as he keeps away; so we are all very well pleased. Father couldn't say much to me, on account of Captain Joliffe's being a soldier, you know; and he dearly loves soldiers. Dolly, dear, you must advise with me about my bridal gown."

"That I will, Prissy, as well as I can."

"I must not stop much longer, but brother Nat bid me pray you from him to speak a word privately with him; he is waiting below. I don't know what 'tis about, unless it be the doves, and creatures at Spincourt, upon which he promised you to keep an eye; but he makes a secret of it, so I will stop and talk to Lady Di's parrots while you parley with him."

"He must stay but a few minutes, then," said Dolly, "for Lady Di and Camilla will be coming in."

She ran down-stairs, feeling she had a very disagreeable task before her, and found Mr. Nat waiting, with a disconsolate air, trying to keep up his spirits by whistling a tune, which failed at every third note and dropped into a feeble minor.

"Mistress Dolly," he began, when he found himself alone with her, "can't you think better of it?"

"Indeed, no, Mr. Nat," answered Dolly; "I am distressed that you should think more of it."

"Maybe you did not fancy the way I put it. 'Twas no disrespect, dear Mistress Dolly, but only on account of Dulcy's being there that I did not bend my knee."

And Mr. Nat immediately proved this by falling on both knees at her feet upon the polished floor.

"Oh, please, Mr. Nat, please rise!" exclaimed Dolly, quite taken aback by the suddenness of the action, and dreading lest Lady Di and Camilla should break in upon them, or the idle, gossipping servants of the house be peeping.

"Mistress Dolly, have you forgotten the gilt gingerbread I brought you from the fair every year; and how I pulled you out of the mud in Ploughman's Lane; and the berries I used to gather for you; and the times I've mended your birds' legs and wings; and the times I've ridden into town for you."

"No, indeed, Mr. Nat, nor a hundred other kindnesses, and you will always be my esteemed, good friend, but——"

"Mistress Dolly, 'tis not that I would claim anything on the score of it, but only to show you how truly I have always loved you."

"Oh, you make me so unhappy, Mr. Nat!"

"That is what I never will do, dear Mistress Dolly! You shall not have to say that again! I humbly beseech your pardon for troubling you, and for thinking that you could look at such a fellow as I am."

"Mr. Nat! indeed, you are far too worthy for me. I wish you happy with all my heart, for I do think you kind, and true, and good; but, please, no more of this matter, you must credit me that 'tis of no avail, and, Mr. Nat, I don't think I should ever be contented with a life like my old one at Spincourt; there is so much more in the world than I thought, and so I should not make a good wife for you, so let that comfort you."

"Well, indeed, if you were to be dull and moped, I could not bear it; you are not like my mother and sisters, and, so I dare say you know best; but, if ever you change your mind, and think you could fancy a plain life, such as ours, you've only to let me know; but, now, farewell—since you will not take me as your husband, I am always your true servant."

He lifted her hand to his lips; poor, honest Nat, he was not awkward and boorish at that moment; and then, ever mindful of others, he asked her to let Prissy know that he was ready to take her home. Dolly went away with a pain at her heart; something whispering to her that the truth and honour of a gentleman might sometimes be found in a rough shell, when they were wanting under a brilliant outside such as Piers Ludlow's.

When Zinzan heard of Captain Joliffe's changed intentions he was almost angry with his friend.

"Why do you wish me to make a state affair of so ordinary a matter?" asked Joliffe.

"That is just what you are doing; state affairs of the kind are commonly conducted in your fashion."

"A very good fashion too. You complain of my making no difficulty in the transfer of my proposals; did you deem me seriously and deeply attached to Mistress Patty?"

"No, quite the contrary."

"Then what have you to say against my marrying her sister, who is not

so indifferent to me? I know no more of either of them than men usually know of their wives before marriage; but I think you mistaken in supposing that a longer acquaintance would have availed me anything. I should have been as liable to be mistaken in my estimate of the lady's character at the end of a long, but necessarily superficial, acquaintance as I am now, and I might have discovered some trifling fault in her which would make me resolve not to make her my choice, and so lose the woman who was really well calculated to make me happy; I have frequently known this happen. I reserve my knowledge of my wife's faults; for, mark me, I do not expect to light upon a perfect woman, until marriage has rendered it to my interest to think as well of her as possible. You may be sure a man will judge more leniently, and, for that reason, more fairly, what is his own. I know Mistress Prissy to come of a sound, honest, well-respected family; to be of a gentle, affectionate disposition, and unspoilt by the world. I take my chance of the rest, with more cautious men, and I flatter myself that a few years will prove me to have been as wise as my neighbours."

"I never yet found myself in the right when arguing with you," said Zinzan. "You almost persuade me that you are the first man who has discovered the short cut to happiness."

"Why expect happiness, my good friend? We are not made for it; situated as we are, there is an incapacity in our natures for happiness; but I believe there would be a nearer approach to it if men did not seek it so feverishly and short-sightedly."

"'Tis indeed strange, considering how short life is, that men should fret and fume over it as they do."

"They will not regard themselves as undeveloped beings; they will want all at once, like children; they will wait for nothing."

"What will your wife say when you talk in this manner to her?"

"She will say, 'Will, thou talkest strange stuff, but I know thou meanest no harm; and so long as thou dost not want me to listen, instead of minding my picklings and my gussets, I am content.'"

"That would ill content me."

"Oh, what a strange monster you seek for a wife! Content yourself with taking your country to wife; 'tis many in one, and so ought to suit you."

"And likely enough she will. She gives me interests wide enough to fill my life."

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE ABBEY.

HEART-SICK with life at Lady Di's, Dolly rose one Sunday morning with a strong desire to hear Mr. Bernard Zinzan preach. Since she had been with Lady Di, she had discovered that church-going was unfashionable; and previous to that she had gone with her mother to St. Michael's, where the drowsy duet mumbled between the parson and clerk, and the fifty minutes' sermon addressed to those reprobates who never came to church, formed a quiet running accompaniment to dreams in which Sir Piers Ludlow chiefly figured. However, she fancied that a sermon from Mr. Bernard Zinzan might at least distract her thoughts; so leaving Lady Di and Camilla to sleep until some kind friend should step in to enliven them with a little quiet ombre, she wrapped herself in her red cardinal, put on her mask, and set out towards the Abbey, followed by Sally, who carried her Prayer-book of goodly size, with a picture of St. Paul's upon the edges. She passed into the gray old nave, whose sole attraction was supposed to lie in the monstrous tablets—semi-classic, wholly heathen—which obtruded their ugliness on every side. Passing these with respectful admiration, Dolly made her way into the chancel, which was well filled by the congregation. The service had begun, and in her unwonted independence she shrank shyly behind a pillar until she was presently offered a corner in a pew by an acquaintance. There had been no improvement in the condition of churches since the time when Bishop Ken

grieved over their neglected and disgraceful state. Roofs were blocked up with lath and plaster, rich mouldings carefully buried in whitewash; the marble carvings and fretwork of older and more reverent times reduced to one dead unsightly level. In one place in the country, sheep were penned in a ruined part of a church simply railed off from that which was used for service; clergymen would leave their cocked hats and sticks upon the communion-table; dogs would run about the aisles, or crouch at their master's feet; snow in winter sometimes drifted in, and lay till it melted on the holy table; hunting parsons would ride across country to do duty, and appear with top-boots under their surplices; in one instance the surplice was used to cover the parson's horse, which was tied to the railings outside, waiting for his master. But stories such as these are countless! If ladies and gentlemen went to church, it was to bow and curtsey, giggle, and chatter and joke behind satin muffs and painted fans. And now Bishop Wilson and Bishop Ken had gone to their happy rest, and the salt of the earth was to be sought in obscure places. The ark was tossing in storm-rack and beating billows, sadly dismantled by the gales of the last century, and fainting hearts were crying: "Carest Thou not if we perish?"

Bernard Zinzan was laying down his life in steadfast performance of his duty, and of duties neglected by others. At that time, according to the Church's injunction, morning and evening prayers were daily said in the Abbey. Through bitter winter and sweet summer mornings, Bernard was there with the few who cared to attend; doubtless many called him hypocrite, as they would now have called him formalist for doing what his vows bound him to do.

Sternhold and Hopkins themselves could not have disturbed the peace which fell upon Dolly as the service continued; it seemed as if she had never heard these same words before. Bernard's earnest, beautiful voice kept her attention riveted; and when the anthem, the first she had ever heard, rose angel-voiced to heaven, she could do nothing but bend her head, and bury her face in her hands. Just before the sermon, more people crowded in, and among them Dolly recognized some of Lady Di's acquaintance, whom curiosity had brought to hear "that strange, clever young Mr. Zinzan." There was a pause of real attention, as with slow steps he entered the pulpit; and all eyes in the crowd were turned upon him in expectation. Pale and serious, with a face that had looked on sorrow, and

the mind of one who, more than his age warranted, was "deep in the study of the heart immersed," he stood before them; and when, in a voice deep, deliberate, and powerful, he gave as his text, "The fashion of this world passeth away," an almost breathless thrill ran through many who had dropped idly in to wile away half an hour. Dolly listened with wrapt attention to the clear impassioned tones. This was rest and freedom, such as she had not felt since last she had wandered in the woods of Spincourt. Never in future years, when the preacher's graven name on a tablet in the old Abbey had long been all earth's visible witness of him, should that sermon be forgotten by Dolly Chesney. Faces turned pale, tears fell from eyes that had almost forgotten how to weep; those trembled who before had had neither hopes nor fears beyond the things of time, as long as they could remember. Bernard, and these be-painted, be-dizened beings might never meet again, and now, at least, they should not ask bread and receive a stone. They had heard enough of religion ground down to heathen morality, and their lives showed how much it had done for them. The world's temple was filled, the temple of Christ deserted. Perhaps some word might ring in some one ear among these people high in station, with life made smooth for them; who never went a step out of their careless way to help a fellow-creature: these, whose idol was insatiate self, whose lares and penates were vanity and pleasure. At least to-day they should listen, not to the voice of flattery, the smooth eloquence of tinkling cymbals, but to the true words of a true man, who from the depths of his own heart spoke straight home to theirs; and some went away offended, and some scandalized, and some smitten to the soul; and Dolly, who knew full well that she was one of the careless daughters, said to herself, "If these things are true, and I know they are, how can we waste our lives as we do!" Bernard was breaking his heart, pleading with those who would not listen, and spending himself in toil which before long would lay him with shut eyes and folded hands, the golden tongue silenced, the burden of the day gone by. To him a voice said, "The night cometh" in the flower of his age. There are some "early called to bliss" whose words and actions "smell sweet, and blossom in the dust," and in the lives of others. The seed scattered long ago, and forgotten, takes root where it was not seen to fall, and will bring sheaves to such as these, when sleeping memory awakens, the barriers between the living and the dead are for ever thrown down, and the great harvest is gathered in.

Dolly came away very thoughtful ; taking pains to shun her uncongenial acquaintances, and thinking, perhaps, as she had never thought before ; but how often are our best thoughts broken in upon ! Mrs. Abigail Bonthram accosted her with her handkerchief to her eyes. "Oh, my dear lovey, Mistress Dolly !" she exclaimed. "I am truly thankful to see you here ; I was turning over in my mind how to get speech of you, without any prying soul near you ; I hope that Sally will keep her distance !"

"How is my lady, and uncle, Abby ?" Dolly inquired.

"Very bad, poor gentleman, he is, and my lady she is took up with nursing him. Well, Mistress Dolly, I am glad you go to hear Mr. Zinzan, he's a blessed young gentleman, though I never thought to care to hear another than good Dr. Wilkinson at Spincourt ; but you can't be off loving Mr. Zinzan, he's not long to go before a better world, more's the pity, and he do speak so beautiful, 'tis purely a comfort to hear him. I was thinking 'twould ha' done my Lady Di, and my Lady Blunt, a power o' good to have heard him this forenoon."

"I think we all need it bad enough, Abby."

"Well, well, leastways not you, lovey. But it wasn't about Mr. Zinzan I had to say, but Sally ; I see the perking thing waiting for you, and turning up her nose at me, forsooth. Sure I always said, if Mistress Dolly wants a waiting-maid to herself, bring Meggie Watson from Spincourt, and have an honest Hampshire lass about us."

"But you did say, Abby, that you were sure you could wait on my lady and me, and 'twas a pity to bring Meggie, to be spoilt in Bath."

"And so it would ha' been, Mistress Dolly ; such a set as these servants are, the lazy hussies ! and Sally, she is the greatest saucebox of 'em all. I can't be caddling my lady about it now, but Sally do come an' tell the girls sich tales, lovey, as you won't credit ! She tell'd 'em as how you was nigh runned away with by a fine foreign count, and how Mistress Cammy Thresher put him in the way o' catching you. Oh, my lamb, don't'ye go and marry a furriner, and break old Abby's heart ! You don't know the things you'd have to eat, and though you was never a one to scream at a frog, a biled or a roasted one is another thing. I'm afeared that Mistress Camilla ain't a real friend to you, she's up and after that conjuring Dr. Smith too often ; and she jealousies ; Sally says, that Sir Piers Ludlow is fonder of you than of her, so I shall bless my stars when you are safe home again with your mammy. Mistress Cammy is fair spoken, I won't say to

the contrary, but there! fair words butter no parsnips, and those conjurers have their tricks a deal too handy."

"Sir Piers Ludlow?" repeated Dolly. "What did Sally say about him, Abby?"

"Just this, that Mistress Cammy would be joyful enough to see your back, my pretty, in hopes Sir Piers would look at her squinney face again. And you come home as soon as ever you can, for from what I hear, that Kingsmead Square ain't a fit place for you."

"Oh, do persuade my mamma to send for me, Abby!"

"There! 'tis nothing but the crankiness of Mr. Bellingham, poor dear gentleman, as prevents her; and milady thinks you're agoin' to marry Sir Piers, but lor, whatever is he such a time before he speaks for, my deary? I wouldn't have it if I was milady, I wouldn't. You ain't thinking of him now, I'll be bound?"

"Oh, Abby, I am sure I know nothing about it! Doubtless my mamma knows best. Sir Piers is a very, very grand gentleman; and, Abby, it's no use talking about him."

"Oh me, oh me!" muttered Mrs. Abigail, shaking her head. "Well, I'm glad I've spoke my mind; take care of Mistress Camilla and Sally; my lady will be wondering where I'm got to. My duty to you, Mistress Dolly, dear."

When Dolly reached home she found Lady Di holding a *levée* in her bed-chamber, and playing cards.

Dolly was ordered to report herself instantly to her, and found her in a furious temper.

"You sly, bold little minx! running off in this fashion from my house. How dare you do it? You deserve bread-and-water diet for a week, miss!"

Dolly was shocked and amazed at such a greeting, and stood in the utmost confusion, while the whole party watched the scene with sarcastic smiles.

"Indeed, madam," she began, with tears in her eyes.

But Lady Di broke in—

"You don't deceive me, miss; that man, Zinzan, goes to the Abbey, and you arranged to meet there! I've no patience with such slyness; and what you can see in the fellow! Mind, I expect a girl in my house to behave herself!"

"Madam, I assure you——!"

"You deceitful little hussy! I wish I was quit of the trouble of you. This comes of keeping a girl at home after she's too old for the birch-rod!" and Lady Di rapped her fan violently upon the table.

Dolly rushed out of the room, sobbing; not that the scene was the insult it would have been to a young lady of seventeen some hundred and sixty years later, for it did not seem so long since the birch-rod had come in smart contact with her shoulders, and bread-and-water and close imprisonment had been meted out after some childish escapade. But still she felt it sufficiently to write a billet to her mother, requesting to be sent for home at once. But Lady Di's anger soon evaporated; she met Sally with the note, which she tore in shreds; kissed Dolly, and bade her not be a little fool again.

"Law, child!" she said, "you might have had Zinzan here, if you had wished to see his grim face again; but, I suppose, you are like all the rest, you would rather see Vulcan on the sly than Apollo with her ladyship's leave. Hey? poor Apollo! Well, there is Mistress Belinda to console him, with gold shining on her head, and jingling in her pocket. There! I'll tease no more; but I swear if you try to go home, I'll lock you up!"

CHAPTER XIX.

FOR THE LAST TIME.

THE Tuesday ball was a straw to which Dolly clung. Ludlow had seemed so anxious to know if she was to be at it; she thought it might really be the end of all misunderstandings and miseries. She felt a sickening presentiment that her future life hung upon it; and while she was being dressed for it she was pale and cold as a statue, until Lady Di marched in, and ordered her to be rouged. She had never looked so handsome before, her large eyes were unusually brilliant, but her lips were tightly set and her hands cold and trembling. He had not engaged her for his partner, and that left her open to a variety of doubts and fears. In a modern ball-room, secret little invisible skeletons may hover about, but hope lingers to the end, and the bitterest quarrel may be made up in the last waltz; but in Dolly Chesney's time there was no shuffling with names upon the ball-card, or anything of the kind; rigid rule permitted but one partner after the minuets, that one in Bath usually selected by the master of the ceremonies, and manœuvring might end in

drawn swords. Dolly took her seat by Lady Di, a prey to suspense, and looked round the room eagerly for Piers Ludlow, but saw him not. Camilla's eyes were also roaming from door to door, and for a marvel she was still and silent. Their names had not been sent in to Mr. Nash as minuet dancers, so they had nothing to do but to wait. Dolly's breath almost ceased to come and go in that agony of expectation. People came in and out, passed and repassed in dream shadows; the band played, the dancers moved, curtseying, gliding, bounding, sliding over the floor; little heels tapped, flat chapeaux were flourished; the air was full of rose and orange-flower scent; of dazzling light, and dust, and hair-powder. Jewels flashed from end to end of the room, faces smiled. They said what a brilliant ball it was, and some of the shadows came and spoke to Dolly, and she got up and made her curtsey, and walked in to tea, and back again, but it was all unreal, she was in a dream.

The ball which had opened so unpropitiously to poor heartsick Dolly was to Prissy Meadowes a scene of unmixed delight and triumph. She came in radiant, as fine, wholesome-looking a young woman as any in the room, with a beaming countenance very pleasant to look upon. Captain Joliffe had persuaded Zinzan to be of the party, and Prissy and Dulcy had put their heads sapiently together and foretold that before long he would certainly pay his addresses to Patty, and that George Colthorp must then and there be put out of her head, and replaced by Captain Joliffe's friend. Patty's head, however, having very little concern in the matter, and her heart being incapable of reason, she had not given a thought to Mr. Zinzan, though it was plain he preferred her to her sisters, and was always pleased to be in her company.

"Only think!" said Prissy to Captain Joliffe, "Mr. Zinzan has not been to one assembly before this season, what a sad pity he don't care for dancing; except for that I think very highly of him."

"I am sorry you should consider it a slur upon a man's character," said Joliffe; "for I never dance myself if I can avoid it."

"Dear me!" cried Prissy, looking commiseratingly at him, "that is monstrous odd!"

"I hope you like me none the worse for so sad a confession?"

"I am sure I shall try to let it make no difference," said Prissy, seriously; "but I did say I would never marry a man who did not love dancing, and dance elegantly."

"Oh! but I did not say I did not dance elegantly. I shall be hurt if you do not prefer my dancing to that of any man in the room."

"I shall be quite pleased to do so; for I would not like Dulcy to be able to tell the Hampshire folk that you could not dance, they would think very ill of you."

"That would indeed be a misfortune. I shall do my best to win the admiration of the whole room, and make some of these young ladies expire with envy of you."

"How droll that would be! Now, Captain Joliffe, what do you suppose induced Mr. Zinzan to come to-night? I think it must be because he admires our Patty."

"How marvellous quick-sighted you are! And what will Mistress Patty say?"

"Why Patty is silly enough to think only of George Colthorp, whom father cannot abide, but she must give him up; 'twould be excellent were she to marry your friend."

"I did not know you were a schemer, Miss Prissy; I did not conjecture that your pretty head contained anything approaching a plot."

"Oh, pray don't think I made any scheme; indeed I am not at all clever, no one ever thought we were, not even Patty, who was the quickest at her books of us all. Indeed I should be very loath to be clever, for 'tis so unbefitting a woman."

"Yes, my dear young lady, I should be greatly alarmed at the thought of a clever wife, and shall think myself peculiarly fortunate if I find you not always wholly unreasonable, 'tis all a man can expect. I shall wish you when you are my wife to esteem me wondrous wise, and to think all I do and say must be right."

"So I shall, I am sure, for indeed very often I do not understand the least in the world what you would be meaning, and that shows that you must be amazingly clever."

"Very good, and in return I shall esteem you the most lovely and amiable woman in the world."

It now became necessary, in accordance with the rules, that the gentlemen should retire to the back of the benches, and stand like a row of footmen or sentinels on guard, behind the dowagers; while the young ladies seated in a long rank in front, tried to look as if they enjoyed watching the minuets, which probably few of them really did. Zinzan,

Joliffe, and Nat Meadowes were together, and the eyes of two cut of the three met in the same point of sight, which happened to be Dolly Chesney, whose attention was divided between the absent Ludlow and Camilla, whom she had watched with a feeling of apprehension she would scarcely acknowledge to herself. Nat's honest foggy soul was in that gaze of his, it afforded him the only satisfaction he was then capable of feeling; but Zinzan looked under protest from himself; he withdrew his eyes, and in a few minutes they were fixed in the same direction again in spite of the resistance of pride, prejudice, and reason. Joliffe was quietly amusing himself by observations upon what was going on around him.

"What a vast amount of pretence I see in this room," he said to Zinzan. "Pretence of wealth, pretence of fashion, pretence of youth, pretence of amiability, above all, pretence of enjoyment."

"'Tis the conviction of that, which makes society distasteful to me," replied Zinzan. "'Tis a blemish so great as almost to make one forget that unless the reality were present, the imitation would not exist. But I cannot contrive to be insensible to the fact that in an assembly such as this, a crowd of educated people are conspiring to cheat one another. We play out a poor farce in society, our backs are breaking beneath their burdens, and yet we must smile, and dance on our way to dusty death."

"That shows that we have still some esteem for the Spartan virtues, and gives me rather pleasure than pain. I admire the way in which we all divest ourselves of our cares, and lock them up at home, before we come out in our motley before the world. There is a decency and respect for others in it which commends itself to my understanding, and my taste. You and I are both too prone to strip away the paint and housings, and disclose the bare bleached bones of the skeleton, but, while you weep philosophically, I smile, also philosophically. I acknowledge your inclination to be the nobler, but mine promises me a surer defence against the trouble and tedium of life. With all your insight, moreover, you are open to keenest disappointment, and will probably meet with it often enough in your career, to learn every feature of its face. Nay, you are the sort of man to court the very same disappointment twice or thrice over, and that when you imagine yourself safest from it."

"There is no better teacher than experience, and I should be sorry to consider myself too dull to learn from it."

"Well, I may be mistaken, but as you have an unlucky knack of taking

what befalls you deeply to heart, I would have you be careful. You have called me rash, but I assure you I consider you more rash than myself, for at least I know whither my plunge will take me."

"You talk in riddles, because you are too lazy to use plain language," returned Zinzan, who was more interested in speculating upon the cause of the anxiety so clearly visible on Dolly Chesney's countenance, than in listening to his friend.

"I shall talk in riddles until it becomes the rule that advice given is always followed," said Joliffe.

"At that rate, your advice, when given, will have the great advantage of a very ripe experience," answered Zinzan.

"I fear little Miss Chesney is an illustration of our recent remarks," observed Joliffe, looking fixedly at Dolly. "She has not spoken to her friends the Meadowes, she hid her face behind her fan when they passed by; but she is not so clever in hiding her feelings. Experience will teach her that, or time will modify their intensity. I do not care to see a young face like that becoming haggard, one need be no physician to tell that she does not sleep."

An expression of pain and indignation came over Zinzan's face. "'Tis that rascally scoundrel's work!" he exclaimed in a bitter undertone. "And there is no help for it."

"'Tis a mean villany," said Joliffe; "a pitiful game which any coward may play, for he has no punishment to fear."

"Such conduct should make us lenient to women who mislead and jilt," said Zinzan.

"Certainly; they but avenge their sex."

"And yet, on either side, 'tis treachery which ill becomes an honest man or woman."

"Sir!" exclaimed Nat Meadowes, turning suddenly to Zinzan, with a burning face, "Sir! I ask your pardon for having overheard what you have just now said, but 'tis concerning that I want to ask your advice. I am a plain man, and do not look at home in all this finery and flourish, and I cannot make myself agreeable to ladies; no, not even though I may have been bred up, so to speak, with one of them, and never given a thought to another. She won't look at me, and quite right too; but no one can prevent my standing by her as her brother might, if she had one. But I'll take your advice, for I see you think with me in the business, as any honest

man must. 'Tis the talk of the place. Shall I thrash the fellow first, or call him out, sir?"

"I should like to be certain of whom you speak, Mr. Meadowes."

"Ludlow, to be sure. He is not here to-night. I came chiefly to have it out with him; for 'tis no great pleasure to me to play the Tom-fool, with no one to give me so much as a kind look. I shall go home if he don't come; I'd rather not see her with another man for her partner."

"I think you did well to consult with a friend before you acted; for I do not imagine you could do a more displeasing thing to the young lady than come forward in her behalf in the manner you propose."

"Aye, aye, because she is deceived by the airs of the villain, she would not like to think of harm happening to him; but if I were to belabour him soundly, sure she would never favour him again. My sisters laugh hugely at a fellow who has had a thrashing."

"That was not my meaning. You are too honest yourself to understand that the world is on Ludlow's side, and admires him for that for which you scorn him; and nothing would arouse its sneers and scoffs sooner than to proclaim that a woman is pining after a faithless lover. 'Tis the world's justice thus to oppress the weak; 'tis not animals alone who worry and forsake the wounded. This is no occasion for your interference, generous though it be; but as you have asked advice of me, I will give it—go back to your home and your own pursuits, and let your unprosperous suit trouble you as little as possible. In time you will perceive that you may find a wife better suited to you than this lady."

"I would have spared nothing to give her contentment," sighed Nat. "But I hope I am man enough to live without her since I cannot have her. So you would have me give up chastising the fellow? 'Twould have mightily lightened my heart to have tried the seasoning of a crabstick on his velvet coat; but I should be a fool not to know you for a wiser man than myself; so I must fain keep the peace. 'Tis an amazing thing to see how the wrong souls get into the wrong bodies; now, if Ludlow's body had been as mean and black and ugly as his soul, where would he have been who is now smiled upon by every woman of them all?"

"Doubtless, such an arrangement would spare a vast amount of deception; but even so, I fancy wit and craft would sometimes turn the balance. Now, sir, I am going to ask Miss Chesney to be my partner; but, if you have set your heart upon dancing with her, I withdraw in your favour."

"No, forsooth!" cried Nat, with a melancholy shake of his head. "I have no fancy for being a cockchafer on a pin for the rest of the evening, knowing all the time that she would prefer any other man in the room. The girls have their beaux, and will not want me—maybe, will not miss me; if they should chance to do so, be good enough to say that I am gone home. So, good-night to you, sir."

They parted, and Zinzan said to himself, as he went to seek Dolly, "That is an honest fellow; I am sorry for him, but he would never have made this girl happy."

The stiff triple row lining the room had now broken up, and there was a pause between the minuets and the *contre danses*, of which advantage was taken for conversation, and a search after partners. By this time Dolly's hope was vanishing away, but the last lingering atom of it made her dread the idea of being asked to dance, in case Ludlow had been unexpectedly detained, and might yet make his appearance. She started visibly when she heard her own name spoken. "Oh, 'tis you, Mr. Zinzan!" she exclaimed. "I am so glad"

Zinzan did not flatter himself that this eager greeting meant much. "I am come to ask you to do me the great favour of dancing with me, Miss Chesney."

Her face fell. "Indeed, Mr. Zinzan. I had supposed you never danced, that is why I was so surprised to see you."

"'Tis an unusual thing with me; nevertheless, as I have been induced to come, I have no wish to appear churlish; I do not think I have forgotten how to dance."

"Yes?" said Dolly, very absently.

"And I may hope you will accept me as your partner?"

"Oh, Mr. Zinzan! what will you think of me if I ask you to excuse me? I know 'tis very rude, and I have no reason, but that I—I am not inclined to dance—but——"

"Nay, give yourself no uneasiness on my account, Mistress Dolly; I am not set upon figuring in the dance. You alone should be my partner, and, as you do not care about it, I will remain with you, if I may, and perhaps ward off others who would be more difficult to reject. Yet, if you change your mind, remember you are not bound to me, and you will not offend me by taking a partner."

"You are the kindest of friends," said Dolly gratefully, and she relapsed

into watchful silence, trusting—poor foolish, faithful Dolly—that the end would prove that every one but herself had been mistaken in Ludlow; and squandering her deepest affections like a reckless spendthrift upon that most unworthy idol. What a world of unnecessary pain she suffered for her unbalanced ideality, which made the selfish man of the world appear to her a hero of romance, a splendid knight from the olden times, chivalrous as King Arthur, courtly as Sir Lancelot! But even if she had believed every word and rumour she heard against him, it would have made no difference then, for she had passed the borders of reason's rule, and was out on the wild sea; the nautilus bark without a rudder now, all gashed and torn, with the unfathomable beneath, and above not a star, but only a flashing meteor luring to disaster and shipwreck. She did not see in the darkness white guardian hands, which had never been far off, resetting the sail, and guiding through the storm-tossed waters, when all seemed most despairing and desolate. Suddenly, Dolly clasped her hands upon her knees, and a mist swam before her eyes, for, at length, when disappointment was too crushing to be keenly felt, came Piers Ludlow, with his easy grace, and his chin in the air, and his good-tempered glance of superiority. Camilla followed him with a steady gaze from the moment he entered; she traced him from group to group, bowing here, speaking there, laughing so pleasantly; his hair powdered white as snow, his stately figure, and handsome profile; his courtly high-bred air. His fine embroidered pockets were absolutely empty—fortune frowned darkly at him, but he laughed back at her. When he had approached within a yard or two of Camilla she beckoned him. With half a glance at Dolly, he came forward, stooped, smiled—and Camilla spoke hastily to him. Telling Lady Di that she was going to have some tea, she rested her hand on his wrist, and he led her away. Dolly looked blankly, wretchedly after them; she had not forgotten Mrs. Abigail's words, and a vague terror of some deep under-plot on the part of Camilla seized her. Tears began to fall upon her black mittens, she tried to blink them away, but another and another came in large drops, and she could only put up her large fan, and wish herself extinguished altogether in its folds. Zinzan had watched it all, and now stood a little apart, knowing that all he could do was to appear not to notice her. Mr. and Mrs. Meadowes, who were strolling round the room, now perceived him, and stopped.

"Fie, sir!" exclaimed the latter, trying to impart an expression of reproach to her broad, ruddy countenance. "How you gave us the slip.

Sure, I thought you would do Patty or Dulcy the compliment of asking their hand for the country dance, and, as I said to the squire, Mr. Zinzan won't find a handsomer nor a brisker partner in all this fine crowd; and he was wondering what had come of you. And now there's both of them been asked, and Mr. Nash so kindly brought up two gentlemen, and presented them pretty well as if they had been princesses; and, I said, well now, I do think you are the two finest couples in the room, always excepting Prissy and Joliffe; and, perhaps, it was taking a liberty, but I could not help asking the gentlemen what they thought of the fashion of their caps, for, dear me, sir, when the milliner's bill came in, I said to the girls, if we stay in Bath much longer we shall be ruined, and don't tell your father, or he will be for taking us all away directly; and, when I told the squire, he was sadly put out, poor man, and said it was throwing away good money upon gimcracks, didn't you, squire?"

"Well, well," said Mr. Meadowes, "I don't grudge the lasses their fun, or their tawdries, so long as they are satisfied to go home when it pleases me; for I've told them plainly that I'll no more of these Bath whipper-snappers philandering about. I suppose there is no help for poor Prissy now, but I mean to keep Patty and Dulcy under lock and key if I hear of anything more of the kind. And I shall carry them off in three weeks, and I wish it might be sooner; but we are bound to stay until sister Flavvy has got the better of her rheumatism, for I'm not going to have my girls spoilt like little Dolly Chesney, whom I knew as sweet and cheery a little lass as ever stepped."

"Stand a little aside, squire," said Zinzan, hastily, taking him by the arm, and at the same time shielding Dolly from view.

"Well, well, what a mob, and a chattering it is!—and now Miss Dolly is a puking, airified damsel, who is well-nigh ashamed to remember her old friends, and has forgotten how to have a hearty laugh."

"Now, squire, I do say you are too hard upon poor Dolly," said his wife. "She never was so hearty as our girls. Mr. Zinzan, where do you suppose they will take their places? I must first peep about till I see them. Ah, there go Prissy and Joliffe; do, Mr. Zinzan, just pop your head between those two old people in front and you will see them, or, perhaps, if you stand on tip-toe, for you are so tall."

"My belief is that Prissy has an inch every way the better of any young woman in the room," observed her admiring father. "Now, I wish

the three would all stand in a row, 'twould astonish some of these good people, they'd think it a sight worth seeing."

While Mr. and Mrs. Meadowes had possession of Zinzan, and were pouring into his ears their pride and admiration of their children, some malicious sprite seized the opportunity to instigate Mr. Nash to look in Dolly's direction, and seeing her without a partner, immediately lead up no other than M. de Bressy, who had recovered from his sprained ankle, and was making his first appearance at the rooms after his mishap. He did not know how far public his discomfiture at the hands of Zinzan had become; and he had not been able to ascertain the truth of the information given him by Captain Joliffe concerning Mistress Chesney's fortune: but he had determined to brave it out with the world, and obtain her as his partner, and he had more hope of finding out the truth about the entail of Spincourt from her than from any one else, for, as a foreigner, he was under great disadvantages in the unravelment of so strictly English an affair. Mr. Nash presented him to Dolly, little thinking of the bitter annoyance he was causing; she looked eagerly for Zinzan, but he was standing with his back to her at some little distance; all she could do, therefore, was to decline the count's hand with the most distant coldness, and thus condemn herself to sit for the rest of the evening. Meanwhile, Ludlow and Camilla were sitting in a recess in the vestibule, as far retired from the rest of the world as possible.

"No, Ludlow, I do not need any tea," Miss Thresher had said, and led her captive through the rooms into this secluded spot. He had often brought her thither in bygone days, but now if it had been possible he would have escaped. He felt so weak in her hands that he was afraid of her now, for she had never entirely lost her power over him. She preserved an ominous silence until they were seated, and he tried rather unsuccessfully to put on an air of indifferent gaiety. Camilla was playing her last stake; the consciousness of this excited her gambling instinct, and gave a keen edge of pleasure to the otherwise painful and bitter anxiety of the moment. She was going to try the strength of her power over him, and knew that the line must bind him for ever, or snap, and leave her covered with confusion, and stricken with despair, for he was her all; beyond him she had nothing. Therefore at her worst she was better than he, for she at least loved another more than she loved herself, with a love strong as death, though also with jealousy bitter as the grave.

As he sat and wondered what was coming, she turned her dark eyes full upon him, and laying one hand on his arm, said in a low, passionate voice, "Ludlow, how long is this to continue?"

"Why, Cammy, what is this? Nay, I will not have you look so fiercely at me; let us be friends."

"Friends!" repeated Camilla scornfully. "Ludlow, you have a heart of stone!"

"Faith! I do not comprehend you, Cammy. You are not like yourself."

"'Tis false! You do comprehend me. You know well enough that my heart has been breaking all these wretched years."

"Cammy, Cammy, there was a time when you were reasonable."

"There was a time when you swore over and over again, that though you could not marry me then, you would never think of another, if I would wait for you; and have I not waited, cruel—cold—heartless as you have sometimes been to me? Have I not forgiven you again and again when you have come back to me, finding all but the love of your poor Camilla empty, and hollow, and fickle? I know not why I should be true to you, but that you have no one else! Oh! how I have despised you, when I have seen you courting Miss Sturges' fortune! That has escaped you; all Bath knows you are a rejected man. Are you content that Belinda should have made a fool of you? The Piers Ludlow I once knew would never have submitted in so poor-spirited a manner to be spurned by that slow-witted puppet. If I could I would tear you out of my heart, though it bled to death, and trample upon you, but I cannot—I cannot! Oh, Piers, Piers!" and Camilla broke into a silent passion of tears, which shook her slight form from head to foot, but even in her utmost distress of mind she did not abandon the instinct of her nature for concealment and self-control. Her face was hidden, and no passer-by could see the sudden storm, strong and painful, as unwonted weeping is apt to be.

She soon commanded her tears, and looking paler than ever, she said—

"Ludlow, we have parted and met many times, but this time we part for ever; we shall neither of us be in Bath many more days. I know more of your affairs perhaps than even you imagine. Shall we part? Is the life's devotion which I have laid at your feet so common a thing that you can afford to throw it away? Is it nothing to you to remember the old times when none shared your heart with me? Can you live without one true

friend in the world? Can you leave me to a life of wretchedness, of subjection to tyranny, of toil and daily ill-usage, and loneliness and humiliation, of which, perhaps, you can form little conception, but which is killing me? And yet if you go, and I die, perhaps that will be best; I shall have nothing to live for. If you can leave me to die then, Ludlow, leave me this instant! Go, or stay; but not as it has been of late."

But her hands were tightly clasped upon his arm, and he could not shake her off. He knew that she had spoken the truth, and he was far from unmoved. Long ago his love for her had died; but such as it was, it was the strongest he had ever felt.

"Well, Cammy," he exclaimed, at length, "it shall be as you please; if you will drive me to ruin, I would at least rather it were you than any other woman alive."

"It shall not be ruin!" Camilla cried, with flashing eyes, and a glow of triumph tingeing her colourless face; "you don't know what good fortune I shall bring you. Oh, my Piers, my Piers, you shall never repent this all the days of your life!"

Poor Cammy! she had not yet learnt the extent of his instability and perfidy!

The couples were taking their places for the *contre-danse* when Ludlow and Camilla re-entered the ball-room; the former with a slightly displeased air, the latter with an unreadable countenance. Camilla was claimed by a partner, and Sir Piers made his way almost defiantly straight to Dolly. She rose directly he asked her, and put her hand in his, while the red flushed to the roots of her hair and the tips of her fingers. But she had forgotten the count, who had remained stationary at her side since the moment of her refusal to dance. He stepped between them, saying, in his broken English—

"Pardon me, monsieur, this lady has refused me. I appeal to the rules. She will not dance this evening, except with me. Monsieur Nash" —(to the despot of the ball-room, who just then passed by)—"this is for you to decide."

The count spoke with studied coolness, which did not deceive the astute Nash, who looked uneasily from one to the other of the two men. But the laws of Medes, Persians, and Nashes must not be broken; the verdict was firmly but blandly given in favour of the count.

"An indictment for high treason, I fear, Mr. Nash," said Sir Piers laughingly; and drawing himself up to his full height, he glanced contemptuously at the count, and grasped Dolly's hand.

"Nay, but, Sir Piers!" cried Dolly, frightened by the count's expression, "only let me explain to Mr. Nash——"

"Explain to me as much as you please," said Ludlow excitedly. "I will not lose a moment of your company; you are wholly and entirely mine till the end of the evening. Are you content to be so?"

"Yes," was all Dolly's answer.

M. de Bressy was furious, and began to feel for his sword, which happily he was not wearing. Nash stood aghast, the picture of insulted authority. This was the first open act of rebellion with which he had had to deal, and Sir Piers Ludlow was the last man with whom he wished to quarrel; brawling in the ball-room would probably end in victory for him, and the signal defeat of justice. He hurried away to call into committee a select number of trusty adherents. The first of these happened to be Zinzan, who, upon being made acquainted with the affair, said at once—

"I think I can put that right, Mr. Nash. The lady had declined my hand previously to that of M. de Bressy, therefore if any one has a right to feel aggrieved I have, but I waived my claim in favour of some more acceptable partner. Furthermore, Mr. Nash, I assure you that had I seen Miss Chesney about to dance with that Frenchman, I should have stopped it, for, as he knows very well, inviting her to dance was a piece of daring insolence on his part. He has yet to answer to me for his conduct with regard to her, which I will explain to you on some fitter occasion. I believe on hearing it you will agree with me in deeming it necessary to expel him from these rooms, and any other you can command."

"Indeed, indeed! But Ludlow! He has shown me the highest disrespect; what is to become of my authority, if hot-headed young men are to trifle thus with me? What will become of Bath, if I do not deal severely with such insubordination?"

"I should let it pass for once," said Zinzan; "you would find him a troublesome fellow to deal with. If you draw attention to his act, it may incite others to follow his example; as it is no one has observed it."

"I will not allow myself to be carried away, Mr. Zinzan, by the impulse of the moment. I see much to commend in your manner of looking at the affair, but, on my conscience, 'twas too bad."

"These are anxious moments in the lives of sovereigns," said Zinzan, smiling, "but I do not think you will regret acting with coolness in the matter."

"Spoken with Mr. Zinzan's customary wisdom, discretion, and judgment. Sir, I look forward to seeing you the leading statesman of our day," said Mr. Nash, bowing himself off, much comforted by being permitted to allow the late disagreement to end peaceably.

Meanwhile the dance was being kept up with its usual spirit, but Dolly found she had a strange partner. Ludlow was madly excited, he was tender, passionate, gloomy, hilarious, rude by turns, until she was fairly frightened. He lavished abuse upon himself; called himself a fool, a villain, the happiest of men, a miserable unlucky wretch—and various other incongruous epithets. Dolly did not know what to say to soothe him; certainly their quarrel seemed forgotten, but it left her in a more heart-breaking position than ever. And this was all that had come of the event she had been so anxiously anticipating. And yet while she was actually with Ludlow, she could think of nothing else; strange, bewildering as it all was, and though she dreaded to cast one glance beyond, for the time it was rapture, though she knew it to be of too slight a nature to bear a breath upon it. Everything seemed falling away from her, and fading and vanishing in her grasp; was her world about to be broken like some bright star coming into collision with a greater? to burst atom from atom, until a shower of burning sparks was all that was left of it, and those fire-flakes to scathe her life?

The painful festivity was over at length; he had told her over and over again that she was the sweetest creature that had ever graced this dismal earth, that she had crossed his unlucky path like an angel; and then he led her to her clair, out of the throng and the light, into the darkness and chill of the night; and clasping her hand fast in his, he whispered, "Sweetest Dolly, promise never to think very ill of me."

"Ludlow!" faltered Dolly, looking up scared and shivering into his face.

"'Tis a pledge, remember! Farewell! Had we met sooner! but no—farewell once more."

He was gone before Dolly could ask what he meant. That farewell sounded like a last one. Should she never see him again? Oh, the shock

of the waking after her long dream! She put her hands to her head, and thought how like this was to being swept away in a dark torrent and drowned, drowned as she might have been at Saltford, had he not saved her. Oh, what a long, long night that was, and would her heart break before morning?

CHAPTER XX.

COLD STEEL.

T was in no very peaceful mood that Piers Ludlow ruffled it that night among the beaux at Harrison's rooms. Play ran high, and much wine was drank. Cards preceded and succeeded supper. The hours fled noisily by, and passers in the street heard the shouts, and said that the gentlemen were merry over their wine. Sir Piers quarrelled with every one, but few cared to come to a serious difference with him, for he was known to have a very skilful knack with the bright bit of steel by his side. Supper was over, and bowls of punch steaming, as the ladles, with Queen Anne's shillings at the bottom, passed to and fro the glasses; and songs were sung and toasts called by one after another of the party.

In the mysterious manner in which such things become known, the report of Mistress Belinda Sturges' rejection of Ludlow had spread through the length and breadth of cynical, bitter-tongued little Bath; and the arrival, on the day of the ball, of the gouty old marquis who was to make the heiress happy by decking her fair head with his pearls and strawberry leaves, had added all the confirmation that was needed in order to seal the discomfiture of the fortune-hunter. He was; in a certain way, popular among his fellows; yet he fancied, in his irritable mood, that sarcastic and covert smiles greeted his entrance to Harrison's rooms. He was scarcely prepared to meet M. de Bressy after the insult he had offered him at the ball; but he was present, and showed no signs of animosity for the time being. There was a cool meeting between Nash and Ludlow; but to his majesty Ludlow condescended to make some apology for his infringement

of the rules, which Nash was well content to accept. M. de Bressy and Ludlow were sitting at the same table when Nash got up to propose a toast. Every one knew that Mistress Sturges was an object of great admiration to him, and was prepared for her name. His speech flowed deviously through a flowery maze of classic illusions and frothy adulations; he was sure all would receive the toast with enthusiasm, and begged that they would suffer no other name to be pledged in those glasses. "To the all-fair Mistress Belinda Sturges, then, gentlemen!" he wound up. The toast was drunk with every mark of respect, and the glasses sent crashing against the ceiling. Ludlow's brow darkened, and he made some impatient movements during the speech, and at the end of it tossed off his wine silently and frowningly. This was not lost upon M. de Bressy.

"Ah, Sa-are Piers," he exclaimed, in an affectedly bland voice, "I fear the wine or the toast are not entirely to your taste. The name of the adorable me-es did not pass your lips, and you emptied your cup as though it held drugs the most bitter."

"Sir! in criticizing my actions you take a most unwarrantable liberty," replied Ludlow angrily.

"Ah, ha, my good sa-are! I fear I touched you somewhat nearly. We worshippers at the shrine of Venus cannot always escape unscathed."

"We are, in truth, apt to meet with disasters; a roll in the mud, for example," retorted Ludlow, laying scornful emphasis upon his words.

The Frenchman took fire at once.

"What is it that you say, sa-are? explain yourself!" he exclaimed, half starting from his seat.

"Nay, I think you comprehend me. I know not the French code of honour, or how the stain of a muddy coat is wiped out; but it differs from our English notions, it appears to me."

Ludlow threw himself back in his chair, and thrust both hands into his waistcoat pockets, and fixed a contemptuous gaze upon the count. M. de Bressy, stuttering with passion, seized a glass of Burgundy from the table and flung it full in Ludlow's face, from whence it streamed down over the lace cravat, and the silver "orrices" of collar and lapels. He was on his feet, and had sent a decanter flying at the count in the briefest possible time; the bottle grazed the count's wig, and smashed against the wall behind. Nash was in between them before their rapiers were out of their scabbards. "Gentlemen, gentlemen! hold!" he cried. Several other

came to his assistance, and held the pair apart; they stood glaring at one another, and remonstrating angrily with Nash and his supporters. It was a difficult case; but a stringent rule of the club was, that disputes were not to be settled by steel. Nash's business was to arbitrate between the disputants, but in this instance he hardly knew how to prevent Ludlow claiming satisfaction for so deadly an affront. Hating blood-shedding, however, as he did, he stood out for the observance of his rules, and solemnly assured the two that expulsion from Christopher's and Harrison's rooms would be the result of an infringement of them. General feeling was, of course, on the side of Sir Piers, and strong efforts were made for an amicable settlement. It was suggested that the count should then and there be expelled, and several voices voted in favour of this notion; but, on cooler reflection, this appeared very undesirable to Sir Piers himself, whose only hope of retrieving his fortune seemed to be gaming, and who had lost far more to M. de Bressy than to any other gentleman. He was angry with his own folly in provoking him before he had been able to win back any of his losses, and therefore the less reluctantly submitted to peace being patched up, and to accepting a forced apology from his adversary. Experienced men shook their heads over it, and, full of old prejudices, murmured, "Better let them fight it out honourably on the spot." But the time for such prompt settlements was over, and soon, with his usual discretion, Mr. Nash turned attention to the cards once more. Some men frowned upon seeing Ludlow presently engaged in playing with the count. But he was bent upon mending his broken fortunes, and he set himself to overruling his unlucky star, in which he firmly believed, with an expression of deep gloom upon his handsome face. The rooms became more densely crowded; gentlemen took their chairs and cards out on to the landing, and down the stairs, while their servants, who were usually to be found there, crowded the outer steps, where they gambled, and drank, and swore, in rude imitation of their masters; while the watchman covered up his dark lantern, and sneaked stealthily by, dreading to attract their attention—which would, he knew, be attended with grievous consequences to himself.

Still the game went against Ludlow; his brow became blacker and blacker. The count had tossed him for a thousand pounds, and won; the oaks in Ludlow Park had gone to the same individual, who was cramming gold and notes into his square embroidered pockets with careless rapidity.

"Pluto's own luck," murmured a looker-on. Ludlow's vivid eyes were settled upon the count with keen scrutiny for some moments. Suddenly he exclaimed, in a voice heard by every one present, "That gentleman has a card under his hand!" and flung down his cards. The bronzed face of the count turned deadly pale as he gave him the lie. Every eye was upon the pair. Ludlow snatched a two-pronged steel fork from a supper tray, and dashed it, amid a silence of horror and suspense, through the count's outspread hand, exclaiming, "If it is not there, I beg your pardon!" and turned the writhing member upwards, with the ace of clubs pinned to the palm. Such things were!—God forbid that the passion of gambling should ever again so far brutalize Englishmen that we may say—Such things are!

One of the thickest of those gray damp fogs which hang over the Avon and its neighbourhood in autumn, was wrapping the country in its dense mantle, when Sir Piers Ludlow, M. de Bressy, and two other gentlemen drove along the Warminster Road together, in the creeping chill of early morning. The mist had not dispersed when they reached their destination, Claverton Down, and they sat opposite one another in silence for the space of an hour, watching the slow thinning of the fog-clouds. The duel was to be to the death, the seconds had bound themselves not to interfere; before they parted life-blood was to stain the fresh green sward. The vapours began to lighten, and road, tree, and down opened before them. Sir Piers, in his stately, urbane manner, said to the count, "Should anything occur to prevent my return, my coach is very much at your service, sir," and was about to descend to the ground, when recollecting himself he bowed, and gave the *pas* to the count, who with equal punctiliousness declined to take it. When the point was settled they walked on to the downs, and took up their position.

No sleep visited Dolly Chesney's eyes that night; she wept such tears as she had never known before, and tossed restlessly upon her bed, or sat pressing her forehead against the window, wondering helplessly at her sorrow, until she wearily heard the clocks strike five. Then she fell asleep suddenly, with the tears still wet upon her eyelashes. She had not rested long, when she was abruptly awakened by the sound of her door bursting open, and starting up with a shiver of alarm, was aware of Camilla Thresher standing pale as death by the bedside. She laid her hand roughly upon her shoulder and shook her, looking in a blind, wild manner at her, as if she scarcely knew what she was doing.

"Camilla, Camilla!" gasped Dolly.

"Look here, look here, you little vain fool! 'tis you who have brought this to pass!" Camilla cried, throwing down a scrap of paper, which Dolly eagerly seized.

Camilla tore it from her hands before she had time to read what was written upon it. She continued—

"Yes, 'tis your fault—yours! Oh, my Piers, my beautiful Piers! you will be murdered—" and she flung herself across the bed with her arms stretched out, and her face hidden.

"Tell me, Cammy, what has happened, I conjure you!" cried Dolly imploringly.

"There! read it, miserable little idiot!" Camilla exclaimed, thrusting the paper into her hand.

Making a great effort to command herself, Dolly read—

"Camilla, forget what I was mad enough to say last night. It is best for you if we never meet again. For myself I care little what becomes of me. By the time you read this I shall be on my way to—I know not whither—or you may seek me on Claverton Down. Let the past die with me—or without me. For the last time, yours, PIERS LUDLOW."

"How and when did this reach you?" Dolly asked, in a strange, forced voice.

"But now, 'twas left with a servant. I know not—do you comprehend, that he—my Piers—mine before ever he saw your puling face—is fighting a duel with De Bressy, who has never been known to miss his thrust—because of *you*, forsooth!" and Camilla stood upright, with wild, flaming eyes, and clasped and wrung her hands. Dolly sprang on to the floor, and began hurrying on a morning dress, as quickly as her trembling fingers allowed; she had merely thrown aside her ball-dress, which lay in a tumbled heap upon the ground, while all the ornaments she had worn were scattered about just where they fell, when she tore them off after that terrible ball.

"What are you about?" asked Camilla sullenly.

"To save him," Dolly answered. "Quick, give me my cloak and hood!"

Camilla mechanically obeyed, and then followed her down-stairs, and helped her open the hall door. She did not speak until Dolly's foot was upon the step, and then she asked where she was going.

"To St. Ann's," was Dolly's short answer, and then she—timid Dolly Chesney—sped away without a thought of fear, though she had never been out alone in Bath before, even in broad daylight. She did not stop to think that if Piers was saved it would not be for her; saved he should be, if she could do anything towards it, and she was going to the Zinzans with a blind faith that they would be able to assist her. Zinzan, who was a very early riser, was taking his first look at the morning, when he heard a loud, uncertain knocking at the hall door. He opened his window and called out. Dolly, recognizing his voice, cried, "For Heaven's sake, Mr. Zinzan, come!" He uttered her name in astonishment, and in what seemed to her an intolerable time, but what was really only a very few minutes, Mr. Zinzan came down and opened the door, and drew her into the hall.

"Mistress Dolly! what can I do for you?" he asked, quickly.

"There is to be a duel on Claverton Down this morning—to the death—stop it, oh, pray, Mr. Zinzan, stop it!" she cried, excitedly laying her hands on his arm.

The thought of Ludlow flashed through his mind, and he asked but few questions. Then he said, "I shall do what I can, Mistress Dolly, but I fear that will be—nothing. Stay here with my mother until I return."

He went, simply to satisfy her; he knew he could do nothing. Duels were not illegal, although, in case of a man's being killed in one, his adversary was obliged to fly the country for a time. He roused Captain Joliffe, and they rode together at a gallop through the lessening mist, while precious minutes were flying fast. By the time they reached the Downs they were soaked through by the fog, as though they had been in heavy rain. As they were turning on to the turf they saw a carriage and four rolling rapidly away in the opposite direction. Zinzan thought he recognized it, and spurred on his horse; drawing up sharply by the side of the coach he looked in and saw Sir Piers Ludlow, and shouted to the postillions to slacken speed. Sir Piers' left arm was bound up in his laced cravat, which was stained with blood; he looked altogether in a strange trim for the man who, eight hours and a half before, had shone as the first exquisite of a ballroom.

"Ha! Mr. Zinzan, good morning to you. 'Pon my faith, I took you for a gentleman of the highway. Has accident brought you this way so early, or do you hunt in Wiltshire to-day?"

"I see my errand is, as I feared, fruitless. You, at least, appear almost unscathed, Sir Piers Ludlow; M. de Bressy has then been less fortunate?"

"What bird of the air carried the tale? I did not know you took so much interest in these little affairs, Mr. Zinzan. Have you any commands for London? I am at your service. None? Then may I request a favour at your hands? Will you so far oblige me as to convey a little billet I have written? 'Twould reach its destination sooner and safer through your hands than by those I had intended to employ. You have some acquaintance with the lady."

Zinzan bowed, and placed the letter in his breast-pocket; he thought of Dolly's despairing face, and his blood boiled at Ludlow's cool flippancy. Sir Piers said he would detain him no longer, bowed, and waved his adieus with his beaver; the postillions cracked their whips, the horses sprang forward, and Zinzan was left behind.

And the other duellist? The count would never trouble Dolly Chesney more; in the wet, down-trampled grass he lay; the blood on his velvet coat, the dew on his rapier, in that dim morning of late October, when the blackberries were ripe on the bushes, and the violets breathing their incense.

In a pretty country churchyard they laid the stranger, far from kith and kin; and there, in worn letters, on an old, worn stone, though more than a century and a half have passed by, a curious eye may still trace faintly a foreign name, telling its tale of evil passions, of wild times, of sharp, short strife, and of a soul driven suddenly forth into a dark eternity.

Zinzan rode slowly and sadly home that morning, thinking of Dolly Chesney, and wondering how she would receive the billet, which he did not doubt was for her. She was with Madame, counting the slow, slow moments as they lagged by, with a great grief and heart-sickness in her pale face and piteous eyes.

"Ludlow is safe," Zinzan said in a low voice, as she met him; "this billet will, doubtless, explain all."

He put the letter into her hand, and turned away to the window. Dolly's head swam for a minute, and she could not read it, then she turned it over.

"This is not for me, sir," she said, with a white face and set lips.

The note was addressed to Mistress Camilla Thresher. Zinzan was

shocked at the mistake he had made; and puzzled Dolly sank down upon a sofa and hid her face. They were alone, and he thought she was about to faint.

"Of course, fool that I am!" he said to himself; "the fellow asked Mistress Thresher to break the intelligence to her."

He gazed helplessly at Dolly, not liking to leave her, and yet wishing for Madam's assistance. But she recovered almost directly; and rising up, she said,

"I have a favour to ask of you, sir."

"Ask me what you will," he answered.

"I wish you to take me to Kingsmead Square, at once."

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"I must convey this billet myself; wait one minute, I am a little giddy, I think; I will seek a glass of water."

She spoke only once as they walked together through the streets, and that was to say in a quietly-pathetic voice, "I trust you wholly, Mr. Zinzan."

He looked down ruthfully at her, and said, "You shall not find me fail you."

"Wait for me, please," she said, as they reached the door. "I must see her alone."

Camilla had wandered to and fro between her own room and Dolly's, since the latter left her, now and then sinking into a kind of short stupor, and again feverishly watching the time passing. "I might have gone, I might have gone myself," was her only coherent thought. "Why did I let *her* go?"

At length came the sound of Zinzan's knock, echoing through the house; and when Dolly reached the top of the stairs, she found Camilla waiting with parched lips, and haggard eyes—unable to speak—waiting for the sentence of life or death. She knew he was living directly she saw Dolly, and snatched the letter hungrily from her, and turned abruptly into her room. Dolly followed. Camilla read and re-read the billet several times, and then held it out to Dolly with a short laugh, whose hollow bitterness rang in her ears for long after.

"You may read it. 'Twill serve to disabuse you of the notion that he fought for love of you."

"Camilla, I write this on my way to London" (so the letter ran). "The

count has fallen, and I must rest in hiding for awhile; 'tis well he was a foreigner. I also am dead—to you. In the old days which are gone by, and best forgotten, you and I loved each other, Cammy—the world soon strangles love—but I swear I never have loved another woman since, as I did you; and I know 'tis not in another woman to be as faithful as you have been. That little Dolly, who will soon forget me, would hate me did she know but the half of what you know of me. So farewell! farewell, Cammy!

"Your wretched PIERS."

"What think you of that?" Camilla asked with icy bitterness.

Dolly was too much stunned to answer at that moment; she put the billet back into Camilla's hand, and looked in her hard, miserable face.

"You were fooled by him, like many others," pursued Camilla, unrelentingly. "I warned you; you would not listen to me; but now I think it has fallen on your head too—the fresh wretchedness you made me suffer. You know nothing of those old days he remembers, they were all for him and me. He wasted and spoilt my life, and I forgive him everything. He only made you ridiculous; do you forgive him?"

"I do," said Dolly, gravely and gently. "And I am sorry for you, Camilla; you are worse used than I am."

"Than you—*you!*" repeated Camilla scornfully. "You baby thing—go. I wish you would leave me!"

"When I leave you, Camilla, 'twill be for good. I am come to bid you farewell. We will not part in bitterness."

"Why, if you knew what I had done, and said, and plotted, you would hate the sight of me; you would not feel safe here, alone with me."

"I know nothing. Good-bye, Camilla, give me your hand."

"Stop; when you came between Ludlow and me, I would have killed you if I could. I planned with the man who is dead to run off with you. Twice it was arranged, and twice balked. I thrust you into the canal purposely, maybe you thought it was an accident; he saved you. But never—never should you have taken him from me."

She laid her hand on Dolly's shoulder; Dolly started.

"Oh! did you fancy he loved your yea-nay puppet prettiness, little simpleton? You have cost me so much that I cannot bear to look upon you; go!" and she pushed her away.

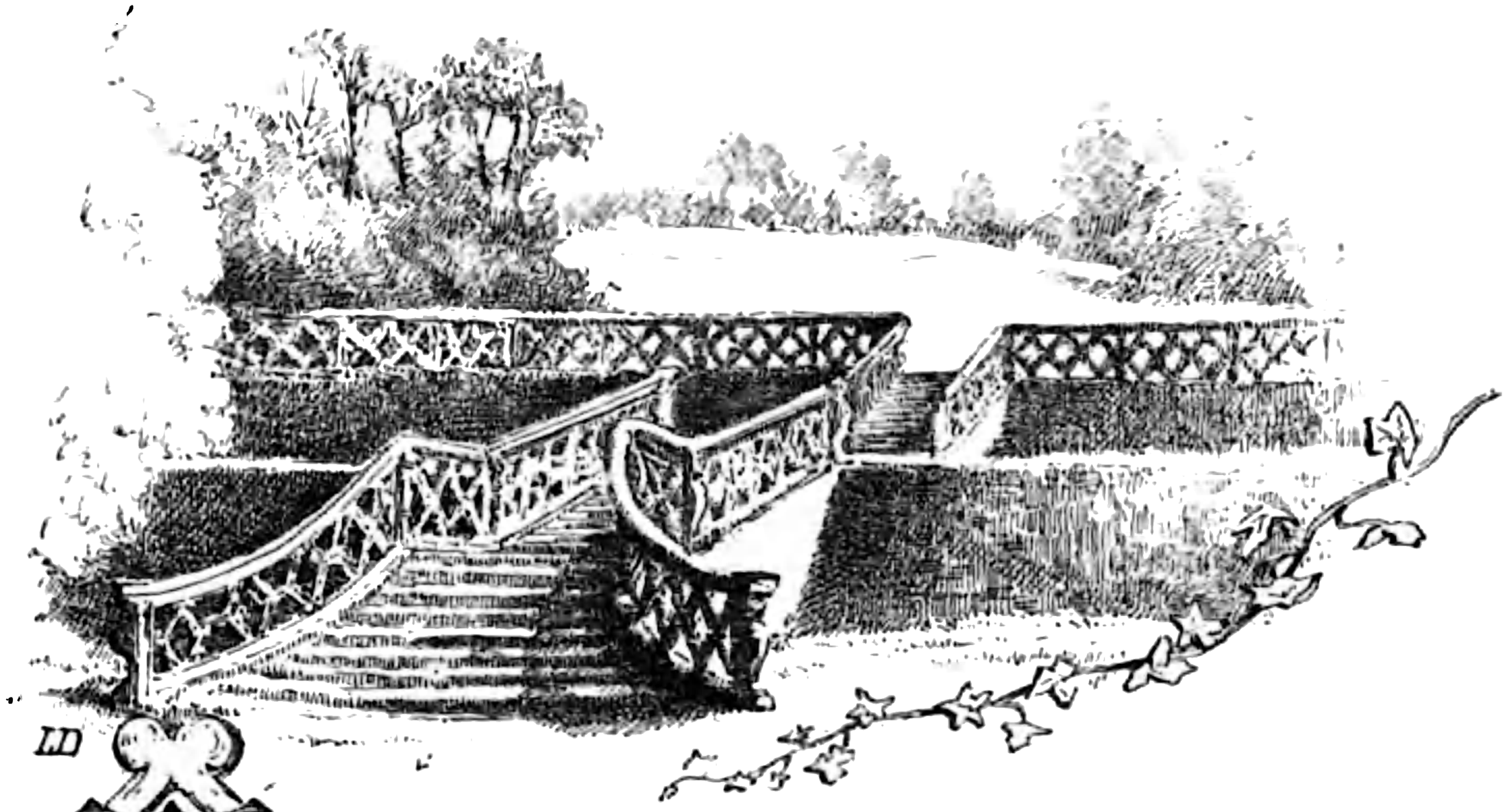
"Camilla," said Dolly, "I do not know if all you have told me is true,

'tis all most grievous. When I came here (ah, how long ago it appears!) I was quite ignorant, and silly, and if you had dealt honestly and truly with me, I should never have come in your way, for I should reckon that a base, ungenerous thing to do. I ask your pardon for the pain I have cost you; alas, my only thought was pleasing myself! I am to blame for all that has befallen me. Farewell, Camilla."

Camilla suffered her to go without a word; and Dolly rejoincd Zinzan, and returned to St. Ann's, still more crushed than when she came. At the foot of the staircase she fell suddenly into a swoon, which was not one of Lady Blunt's sort, admitting of the arrangement of a stray curl.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SUN-DIAL'S MOTTO.



THERE was no going back to Kingsmead Square for Dolly Chesney; no one would hear of it. She was ill, and she grew well in the quiet old house to which she had fled for help in her trouble, though taking so much pains to avoid it in her prosperity. Madam Zinzan was in her element with the sick and helpless, the desolate and oppressed; and Lady Chesney came every day to see her poor child, who had caught such a terrible chill, in her mad, indiscreet run to St. Ann's at dawn of day. She found that she must dispute the palm of good nursing with her old friend. They found great solace in shaking their heads over one another's prescriptions, and kindly pitying one another's prejudices. Many were the arguments held over the terrible array of bottles in Dolly's room; but in their hearts they were beginning to love each other again as they had done in their school-days; and Madam used to watch eagerly for her friend's sedan swaying down the road of a morning. Poor Lady Chesney! she would have been deeply scandalized if she had known that her own, only child had given away her affections unrequited;

she had often observed that, "A young lady of quality should never allow herself to think of a gentleman until he declared himself her suitor; and should then give him his answer without a moment's hesitation." But Mrs. Abigail Bonthram was less short-sighted; she looked at Mistress Dolly and then she said to herself, "'Tis not much of a chill, I reckon, so much as my lamb is hurted in her mind. I don't doubt but what she has made out what a bad, false lot she has fallen amongst."

With the last days of mist-clad November went out the gay world of Bath. Houses were closed for the winter; grass began to spring up in the streets so lately noisy with brilliant equipages. The Assembly Rooms were shut, the ring was empty, the promenades deserted, the bands silent. Some health-, not pleasure-seekers, still haunted the pump-house, without having to wait for their turn at the pump. Lady Di Buckler and all her party had made their dashing exit; but still the Chesneys remained behind, and still Madam Zinzan cosseted up the broken-winged little bird that had taken refuge in her bosom. Piers Ludlow's name had never passed Dolly's lips, but had rarely been absent from her thoughts. There had come a great rent in her life, and a sore shrinking from old associations. But no physicians in Europe, none who minister to the mind diseased, could have done so much for her as that little billet. There was no room for blindness. She knew that she had been woefully deceived by two she had trusted; that Piers Ludlow had merely pleased his vanity, and given his shallow flatteries, his idlest moments, to her. What matter the dark spots in the sun, when its brightness dazzles the attempted gaze? she had seen no faults in him once, but now her Phœbus had fallen. There was no piecing together the fragments of her idol, and weeping over its shattered comeliness. For ever the golden, rosy haze through which the world had sparkled had been torn away. The bell might toll, not for the death of the body, not for the blasting of love, and hope for life; but for the sweetness and the glory, the glamour and the full trust in the future, and in her fellows, which should never come back again. To learn to doubt is very hard, and to enter for the first time into blank and heavy days is very hard. She said to herself, "The sun-dial warned me, and this *is* the night." But she soon found that it "is to the night that we are indebted for the light of stars." Years after she wept when she remembered what Bernard Zinzan had been to her in her first trouble. He it was who took her by the hand and pointed upward for comfort. In the revulsion of feeling she thought him quite flawless; and

then she experienced the strong, noble influence of a high, pure character breathing altogether a clearer atmosphere than her own. They did not send her to recruit her spirits in sea breezes; to sit and dream away the languid, lonely hours, on some rocky beach, the very ripple of the waves telling her her own sad little story again and again. They did not bid her sorely-wounded heart lift itself up, as though it had never suffered, and show a brave, hard face to the world. They simply cherished her, while time did its gracious work; and Bernard's kindness and cheerfulness helped to bring back the ring to her voice, the brightness to her eyes. She learnt how beautiful the life of a "selfless" gentleman can be; how rare it was she knew. Grenville went back for a time to London on political business, but she scarcely missed him.

When, in her solitary hours, Lady Chesney reflected upon the past campaign, she was constrained to admit that it had been a failure. She resented Ludlow's sudden disappearance without having paid his addresses seriously to her daughter; she thought of all those carping, ill-natured country neighbours would say, putting their dull heads together; she fretted over Dolly's loss of health and spirits, and was inclined to blame her for it; she was annoyed by good Mrs. Meadowes spending an hour with her, talking with great satisfaction over her future son-in-law. True, Lady Chesney said to herself, Dolly should never have married so crotchety and singular a man as Captain Joliffe; and she came to the conclusion that she could not have brought her daughter to Bath at a more unpropitious time. The ideal son-in-law had not appeared, and there was now no chance of his turning up. She wondered why a cold caught in Bath should be so much more slow of cure than one caught in the country, which a warm posset would have cured at once; and made up her mind that Madam Zinzan loved nurse-tending too much to allow of her charge recovering as quickly as nature intended. She said to Mrs. Abigail, that a treacle posset, a little horehound, and some tansy broth, ought to set up any girl of seventeen in a fortnight, and it was only Madam's fiddle-faddles which kept Dolly back. Mrs. Abigail quite agreed, but added that a few snails pounded up with a live swallow, and a bunch of nettles, would infallibly succeed, even if the other remedies did not prove equal to the occasion, and wished she had the poor lamb in her own hands, that she might prove their efficacy. Happily for Mistress Dolly, she was under a milder regimen, and after a time she returned to her usual health. Piers was false,

and far away. Camilla had betrayed her; junketting and dancing were over; but evil indeed must be the case where, at seventeen, when one interest in life vanishes, another, though perchance a far lesser one, does not succeed it.

On a table in Dolly's chamber stood a toy-house, which showed the state of the atmosphere by means of two puppets which appeared alternately on guard in front of it; and she was child enough to watch this as she lay awake in the morning, with the fancy that it pictured her own fortunes. The little gentleman in pink coat and curled peruke represented Piers Ludlow and fine weather; the little grey puppet, muffled in a long cloak, stood for Bernard Zinzan and rainy days. She used to look for them the moment she awoke, and sighs greeted the grey figure at first, but after a time it received a faint smile of welcome. Bernard's duties did not leave him much spare time when at home, but he never let a day pass without a little talk with Dolly, or a walk in the garden, or reading aloud. Madam Zinzan sometimes took her to visit Bernard's poor, for she kept up her country custom of taking round baskets of good things, though she was much ruffled by the churlish or fawning reception she often received; comparing it with the hearty welcome of her Berkshire people.

At home, Dolly was kept well employed with work, which she would not have enjoyed had it not been enlivened by Madam's conversation and anecdotes, and sometimes by a poem or romance. When Grenville returned to spend Christmas with them he was often their reader, and one day he produced a little manuscript volume of poems for their entertainment, which Madam, in the pride of her heart, informed Dolly were written by her son, Bernard, in former years. Dolly was as full of awe and admiration as she could desire, and looked respectfully at the pages, and begged to be allowed to read them again to herself.

"You will find them hard to decipher; for you are not so well acquainted with this crabbed hand as I am," said Zinzan. "But your admiration pleases Madam, whose sole weakness is an over-estimation of her two sons."

"You, at least, never wrote poetry, Mr. Zinzan," said his mother. "To my knowledge, you never penned a line; though I always wished you to be something of a poet; I reckon it a finish to a gentleman's education."

Zinzan laughed.

"'Tis one I shall ever lack I fear. A subject for verse does not occur

to me, unless I happen to have just read some poetry, when I wonder why I should not be able to do what seems so mighty easy to another man. Besides, one can never be beforehand with the poets; they seize every idea, and one can only say, 'perish those who say our good things before us.'"

Dolly did not feel so much at her ease with Grenville as she did with Bernard, although she had seen so much more of him. Perhaps she had grown more shy of the elder brother since she had been in the same house with him, remembering, as she must, how closely he had been linked with all that had been painful in her late experiences. When they were all together she spoke little and listened a great deal; often with wondering eyes and ears, when Grenville spoke; for she had very great faith in his talents and learning. Indeed, she was sure the welfare of the country hung upon him, and thought it very good of King George to allow him a holiday now and then, as public affairs must come to a standstill when he was absent from London. He was not so genial and friendly as Bernard, and treated her with ceremony, which made her feel embarrassed, and, in short, seemed to be slipping back into the grim Mr. Zinzan of her first acquaintance. When Bernard's poems had been read and admired, it happened that she was left alone (a most unusual thing) with Grenville, as Madam was summoned to make tea in the hall. She was sitting in the fire-light; her soft India muslin, her fair hair, and her sweet face, which had not yet regained its bloom, bathed in the glow. Grenville was standing in front of the fire.

"Mistress Dolly," he said, "I am charged with a message for you from Mistress Prissy Meadowes. The family leaves Bath on Friday,"—the squire's three weeks had been considerably prolonged,—"and they hope to do themselves the pleasure of calling to take leave of you to-morrow. I think Mistress Prissy has not yet given up all hopes of persuading you to attend her wedding."

"'Tis no use persisting," said Dolly, pettishly, "I do not mean to go. I love Prissy, but I do not love to go to her wedding. Have you promised to go, Mr. Zinzan?"

"Upon my word, I believe I shall not be excused. 'Tis hard enough, for I am too old for such festivities, Mistress Dolly."

"Are you, indeed, sir! Then I am sorry you have to go. I should not like it; not because I am too old, I suppose, but I wish for nothing

but this dear, quiet place with Madam, or to go back to my mamma; indeed, I fear 'tis wicked; but do you know I am almost sorry to be going back to the Abbey Litten—'tis not home. Yet, perhaps, 'tis time; for I am beginning to feel as if this was my home. Did you see Patty as well as Prissy, sir?"

Grenville did not seem to hear her question.

"You leave us soon, then?" he said.

"In three days. Mr. Bernard is late to-day; I hope he will come in to tea; I do not like to lose any of his company, as I shall have so little more of it."

"He will be sorry to lose yours, I am sure, Mistress Dolly."

"Ah, how good he is! He should be called Barnabas, the son of consolation, instead of Bernard. Our summer friends fly away with the swallows," she continued softly—more to herself than to him—"and he is like the robin that comes close to us and sings when they are gone."

"Will she bestow upon him the crumbs of affection which she has wasted upon them?" he thought. Aloud he said, "And so you must leave us. We shall be but dull without you, Mistress Dolly."

"You are pleased to say so, Mr. Zinzan."

"Nay, I have lost the trick of saying what I do not mean, if ever I had it. St. Ann's will lose the fairest thing it has seen for many a day. Indeed, I doubt if any of the female branches of our tree could have stood the comparison for a moment, even attributing most part of their stiffness, sourness, and duskiness to the genius of the artists to whom we owe those portraits, for which I have always felt so profound a reverence. Without undue family vanity, I think that is a fair conclusion, as many of them have brown roses in their hands."

"Perhaps roses were brown in those days, and ladies grim," said Dolly.

"Then I am thankful my lot is cast in more modern times."

"I should not have supposed you would care."

"You think me wondrous old and sour, doubtless, Mistress Dolly."

"Not sour, Mr. Zinzan!" Dolly exclaimed.

"Only dull and ancient. Well, then, you see how much we need you here, who are neither; but that cannot be, I know; we must deem ourselves happy to have kept you so long."

"You go back to London soon, do you not, sir?" said Dolly, looking wistfully up at him. London contained Ludlow, Miss Sturges, Camilla,

all in whom she felt keen interest, whose images were yet vivid in her mind. They would fade little by little, but not all at once. She could ask no questions, but she longed to hear something about them. She did not even know if Piers was going to marry Belinda, and had heard nothing of the coronet in prospective. Zinzan thought she must be thinking of Ludlow; wondered if he rightly guessed the meaning of her wistful, questioning eyes, but could not make up his mind to speak of anything which had reference to her trouble; so he merely answered her spoken words, and let the pleading of her troubled hazel eyes pass unnoticed. Dolly gave a long sigh, and leant her face upon her hand. Just then tea was announced, and she rose. Zinzan delayed her for a minute.

"You will not forget, Mistress Dolly," he said, "that you have true friends here whenever you need them. You said once that you trusted me, I hope you may do so always; and if ever you stand in need of a dull, ancient friend, remember that you have one at your command."

"I shall never forget your goodness to me, sir, for which I never have, and never shall be able to express enough thankfulness. And I esteem your kindness the more, that you were inclined to think ill of me at one time."

"How do you know that? You make me take shame to myself."

"Yes, I am sure of it, and I am glad of it; for I did you and Madam and Mr. Bernard great injustice when I was too silly to know how good you were. Ah! how deceitful"—Dolly's voice trembled and sank.

"There are some lotteries better lost than won," Zinzan murmured, as he held open the door to allow her to pass into the hall. "Poor child," he thought, "poor child!" and was grave and absent during tea-time.

Mr. Bellingham was not inclined to return to Spincourt at present, as he did not think he had yet imbibed enough of the mineral waters. It was a good thing for Dolly to be spared the long winter days at home; the long silent hours of needlework, which would have fallen to her lot. With a "cat's cradle" in a silk stocking might be interwoven her whole pitiful little story from beginning to end, and it was well for her to have little time to spend in dreaming over it. She clung to her friends at St. Ann's, as if only with them she could be safe from the ghosts of the past who swarmed about her when she was alone.

The Meadowes family, all but poor vanquished Nat, who had gone home already, paid their promised visit, and filled Madam's parlour with

their large persons, their loud voices, and their warm greetings, amidst which slender Dolly seemed swallowed up and lost. They all set upon her at once to persuade her to change her mind, and go to Prissy's wedding. Dolly shrank from the thought of the boisterous festivities which would attend it, and scarce knew how to reply; but as they all talked at the same time she was spared any very definite excuses, and shook her head, smiled rather sadly, wished dear Prissy happiness, and hoped they would not all be very angry with her. Mrs. Meadowes was the first to give in.

"Well, my love, though poor Prissy can't but take it unkind (and who would have thought, when you chose her wedding gown with her, that you would not see her in it!), you must take your own way, and I don't wonder, either, though you know my dear Prissy is a good three years older than you, so 'tis no want of friendship her getting married first. I'm sure I said to the squire and all my daughters—didn't I, squire?—that we should certainly see you married when we came to Bath, and so pretty as you was, and will be again, I don't doubt, when you get your colour back."

"Well," cried Dulcy, "I'm very cross that you are not coming, Dolly, and I do wonder at you; such fun as we shall have! But, Dolly, now, I want you to say whether or no you think we might invite Sir Piers Ludlow to Prissy's wedding? I've so set my heart upon it."

Dolly turned pale and caught her breath; that name struck her with a sharp, sudden pain.

"Fie, Dulcy! to hanker after a man who has done so shocking a thing as to kill another!" cried Patty.

"Let me hear no more of that young spark," said the squire. "One of your fine Bath swaggerers is enough for me."

"Oh, father!" exclaimed Prissy, reproachfully.

"Well, well, well, it don't matter what I say, when my girls are all getting tired of me, and want to be away."

The three daughters joined in protesting against this, and Dulcy made no further reference to her fancy.

"We shall have you back amongst us yet," said Mrs. Meadowes, nodding cheerfully at Dolly. "I told Nat we should, for he seemed rather low, poor fellow. I don't think you have behaved quite friendly to him, Dolly; but girls' heads will get turned; and he's gone home now, as you know, to get things straight for us, for we shall all be put to it to have everything ready against Prissy's wedding."

"Dolly!" cried Dulcy, who was very apt at making unlucky and ill-timed remarks, "you don't wear your pretty little pearl ring now; you have not been so unlucky as to lose it, for sure?"

"No," answered Dolly, quickly. "'Tis quite safe."

"But you used to be so partial to it; why don't you wear it?"

"How you tease, Dulcy," said Dolly, pettishly.

"La! I did not mean to make you cross. Dolly did not use to be so quick-tempered, did she, Patty?"

"Dolly looks but poorly yet," said good-natured Mrs. Meadowes. "She won't be hearty again until she is back in the country. As I always say, there is no knowing what you are eating in a town. There's no confidence to be put in the bread or the milk, and I'm sure about the butter. One would think cows were not the same animals here that they are in the country. So don't find fault with Dolly, for you may depend that 'tis nothing but that which makes her fretty."

The attention of Mr. and Mrs. Meadowes was now claimed by Madam Zinzan; and Grenville coming in, sat down by Prissy; so the other three girls were left to themselves.

"Every one makes such a fuss about Prissy," said Dulcy, "that 'tis almost enough to make one vow to get married oneself; only the fun is soon over, and I think I would sooner be bridesmaid than bride; so I shall wait till you two are married, and then I shall think about it. As Prissy is to marry so fine a gentleman as Captain Joliffe, she ought to find another for me, for I shall not look at any of the Hampshire people. How fine she will be with her house in London!"

"I think that is the worst of it," said Patty. "I hope I may always live in the country, or by the sea."

"Oh, indeed, by the sea!" repeated Dulcy, significantly.

"No, Dulcy," said Patty, pathetically. "I know what you are thinking about, but I am convinced that it will never be, and I hope I shall see you all happy; and Nat and I will stay at home, and be as cheerful as possible."

"Oh, Patty, dear, you will always have me for a friend," said Dolly, taking her hand. "'Tis a sad, sad world!"

"La, Dolly, and you have been having so much pleasure in Bath," cried Dulcy, in astonishment. "I don't know what to make of it; sure you must be ill!"

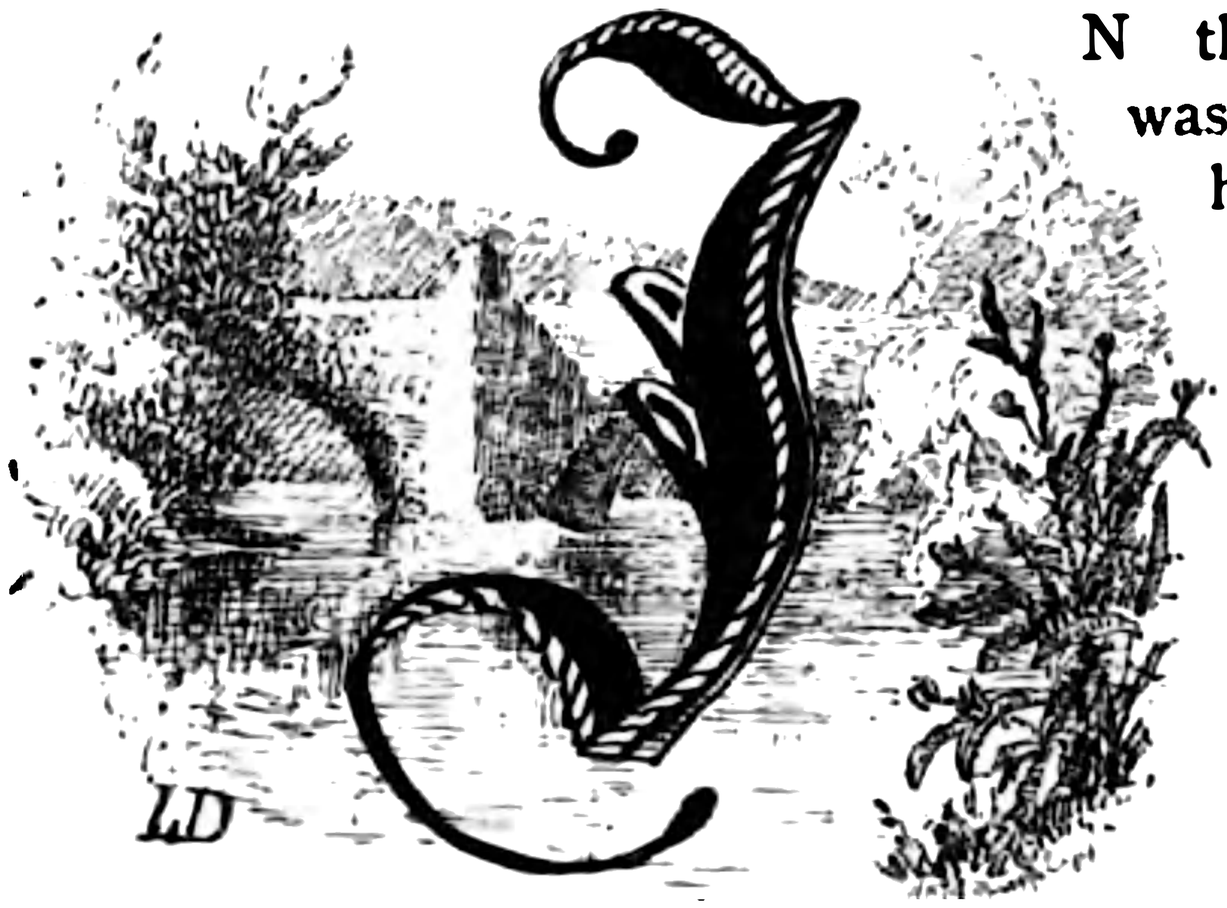
Dolly's only answer was a sigh; Patty looked sympathetically at her. They each felt that the world was a blank for them, and mournful resignation all that remained. Dulcy came to the conclusion that they were both excessively dull; she did not appreciate the romance of the situation. The visit, which was very long, came to an end at length.

"So I think," ran on Mrs. Meadowes when they were all standing together. "No one can say that we have not done well for our Prissy, and that she does not deserve her good fortune. To be sure! the pains I have taken with her; she can do tent-stitch, cross-stitch, satin-stitch, and herring-bone; and make bead-baskets, and has a light hand for pastry, and knows every charm for whooping-cough, and ague, and quinsy, and what-not, and can brew punch to her father's liking, and dress a burn or a scald with any 'pothecary. And I've reason to be proud of her, though I say it to her face. But, then, she owes it all to me, you see, Madam, so no need for her to be set up; and Patty's a better hand with the home-made wines than she."

It was a difficult matter to arrest Mrs. Meadowes when she got upon so congenial a subject, but advantage was taken of her pausing for breath, and the leave-taking began in earnest. Prissy hung weeping upon Dolly's neck; Patty clasped her hand tightly, and whispered affectionately in her ear. Dulcy began to cry, but the prospective excitement of the wedding occasioned a short supply of tears. The squire wished Dolly safe back among her country friends; and, amid laughing and crying, and a confusion of last words, they all departed.

CHAPTER XXII.

A BUNCH OF DEAD VIOLETS.



N three weeks Prissy's wedding was over, and Grenville Zinzan had brought back an account of it. There had been great festivities, and Dulcy was more than ever sure that the bridesmaids had the best of it. Captain Joliffe did not appear to be troubled with any doubts as to the wisdom of his unpremeditated deed, and went through the affair with as much equanimity as though it had been some one else's wedding instead of his own. Dolly's absence had been loudly lamented, and much love sent to her. Patty had veered round, and thought if George Colthorp were to come home soon, his suit stood a fair chance of success. Meanwhile Dolly Chesney had left St. Ann's. She parted from her friends with a sad countenance; Madam kissed and blessed her, bade her be a discreet and obedient maiden, drink her tansy wine regularly, and come to see her every day. Bernard, with his sunny smile just tempered with regret, said he should sorely miss the welcome of her sweet sister face; and Grenville, though he bade her farewell with a grave stateliness peculiar to himself, bent a melancholy face over her hand, as he left her in the Abbey Litten, and turned back to his quiet home, which wore a more desolate look than he had ever observed before.

Had Piers Ludlow never existed, Dolly's life for the next two months would have been like a diet of bread-and-water in a prison, after feasting

in a palace, but as things were she did not fret over it. The essence of enjoyment had been extracted, leaving behind tasteless dregs, and she could not have endured the old whirl of pleasure-seeking. It was clear however by this time, that "Died of a broken heart" would not be written by shadowy fingers over the epitaph on Dolly's tomb, as it is on so many.

"I shall not go out of my way again to seek a match for Dolly," Lady Chesney said to herself, "I shall wait for overtures to be made to me. I trust Mr. Bernard Zinzan has no pretensions; I could never give my consent to a younger son, and a clergyman. I observe his name is constantly on Dolly's lips. Now Mr. Zinzan, if he were not so clearly determined to remain a bachelor, and were less odd and repellant in manner, and was not so much older than Dolly, and was not so deeply immersed in parliamentary affairs, would be quite unexceptionable; certainly I should wish more of a man of fashion; also I must be satisfied how he stands with regard to the property. I always understood that it was entailed, but, unless he is ambitious of distinction, he seems more active in public matters, than one would expect in a man of handsome estate."

Mr. Bellingham on his part said, "Sister, how about this starched fellow Zinzan? good family, good property; disagreeable, crabbed fellow, giving himself up to most unnecessary drudgery as a member of the Lower House, but mark me, a fine establishment for your daughter—as times go. I blame myself for not having settled her before, but this gout, this gout! it upsets all my plans."

"Dolly would grace a coronet, Mr. Bellingham."

"Well, well, get her one by all means, the sooner the better; they are not to be plucked off every bush. Where is handsome Ludlow? gone—flown, eh?"

The winter months with their short days, sharp winds, and drifted snows passed by. Dolly heard that Mistress Sturges was married, but no news of Piers Ludlow had reached her. She buried her dead love, and roses and heart's-ease grew over the grave, but not until she went back to St. Ann's. She was missed there more than she had any idea of, and she grew dull and moped in the Abbey Litten, where she was left too much to her own thoughts, and had too little employment. There was some talk of going back to Spincourt, when the Zinzans pleaded for another visit; and, full of delight, Dolly was re-installed in her old quarters.

Spring came again, warming the roots of the trees, and sending the sap

into the vivid buds; flowers opened their eyes to see her gracious magic over the land; and, with sweeter, fresher things, old, sleepy Bath awoke from its nap under the snow, pruned its fine feathers, and opened its beak for its willing prey. The stone in the little country churchyard, engraven with a foreign name, after lying in sunshine and frost hidden by a rich russet pall of leaves in autumn, and by a pitiful mantle of snow in winter, now emerged gray and old-looking, with lichen creeping stealthily about it, as if that too would hide the story from all eyes.

When Dolly went back to St. Ann's she learnt what a blank her absence had left by the welcome she received. She felt flattered when Zinzan said that he had missed her; he was always kind to her, but she had not supposed her presence could be of any account to him.

The bands had begun to play on the promenades; Mr. Nash's coach re-appeared in the streets, brilliant as ever; and the shutters came down from the windows. Lady Chesney had announced her intention of taking Dolly on to St. Mary's ramparts, for the days were lengthening, and the sun was shining throughout the valley of the clear Avon. It was no longer a sunset promenade, and there were not yet so many people assembled as in the autumn, when the Chesneys and the Zinzans set out together. The elder ladies took the lead, Dolly and Grenville followed. When she had walked there with him before, there was not one of those other men, those brilliant, ephemeral Mayflies that haunted the ramparts, who had not been preferred to him by her; but a great many things had altered since then; Dolly's opinions in particular had undergone a revolution. The Mayflies were flitting about as usual; there were the usual groups of pretty, giggling girls; Dolly sighed as she passed them, and wondered if they too would meet false loves, and false friends to sober them. And there were the tottering beaux and belles of fifty years since, bedizened as before—and once more Dolly felt that she had nothing in common with these people. Suddenly she saw what sent the blood rushing to her face, and made her heart beat wildly. There, full in front, so that escape was impossible, came Lady Di Buckler, brief-petticoated, loud-laughing, with her satellites about her—a new set since last autumn, for, though she does not grow any older, they do—and there is Camilla Thresher, with Mr. Simmonds hanging over her, as he was wont to hang over Lady Blunt. A space behind comes Sir Piers Ludlow, a shade redder, a shade coarser, a shade less good-tempered than of yore, signs of what he will be in time; and he leads by the hand

the fair Lady Blunt herself, whose opinion, formed early in life, and destined to go with her to the grave, that she is the rose among flowers, the peerless among women, has now reached its climax, in spite of the fretfulness which grows daily upon her.

"Quite a display of brides!" cried Lady Di, after an effusive greeting. "Did you hear that Ludlow had married the widow, and Cammy Thresher had taken compassion on Simmonds? I vow I don't know which is the richest; but I wager Cammy will be in the end. They've the mines of Mexico and the Bank of England between 'em, I believe. The rest of the world are beggars to 'em. Dolly, my love, how vastly ill you're looking; but a few frolics with me will soon set you up. Do you remember Saltford? That was rare fun! we'll get the same party together again, and go a-gipsying; I vow we will."

So Time plays the game of metamorphosis.

Ludlow came, bending low over the hand of his foolish bride; he passed without a glance at Dolly, turning his face away. At the end of the terrace he bowed, and turned off with his beaver under his arm, and an attempt at his old swagger; but well he knew and keenly he felt the presence of Camilla and Dolly.

Where the waves of the sea have washed the shores they have altered the face of them, though they have rolled away for ever. Dolly's eyes followed Piers Ludlow as he disappeared, as though she were looking upon the portrait of some long since dead face.

So the uttered and unuttered wishes, lightly spoken, or dimly felt, at the well on the hill-side, on a past autumn day, found their several fulfilments.

To Piers Ludlow, wealth; but, withal, bitterness to his soul; to Lady Blunt, the gratification of her vanity, which was heightened when, by two deaths, a coronet descended to her husband; to Mr. Simmonds, an adored tyrant. Poor Simmonds! it must have been a harsh nature which could spare no pity for him. To Camilla came retribution; not through the friend with whom she had dealt falsely; not through the many she had deceived, but through him to whom in all her scheming and false ways, knowing his weaknesses and his sins, she had been faithful through evil report and good. The cloudy, wayward course of her future life never again crossed Dolly's path; it was well for Dolly that it was so; it would have been better for her that they had never met.

Grenville Zinzan made up his mind to go back to London, and there to stay until the Chesneys were at Spincourt again, and after that, until he did not know exactly what. But that so great a change had come over the astute and misanthropic Zinzan as to render it unendurable to him to be any longer in little Dolly Chesney's company under present circumstances, was an undoubted and most singular fact. On the eve of his departure, however, a few words passed between himself and his brother which changed his plans. He asked him abruptly—

"Do you intend seeking Mistress Chesney as your wife?"

"No," Bernard answered; "but you do, and I hope speedily."

And Grenville did not go to London; he went into the hall, and there he found Mistress Dolly playing battledore and shuttlecock. He joined her in the childish game, as he had sometimes done before. The feathered cork flew nimbly about between them; Dolly, counting and panting, sent it wavering to one side. They both struck at it at the same moment; the shuttlecock, indeed, flew into the air; but down fell, with a great crash, the fine old china vase, which had been the princess's present to Madam Zinzan, breaking into a dozen pieces, and scattering the oaken floor with crumbling *pot-pourri*.

"Here is mischief!" said Zinzan, while Dolly stood aghast. Then she stooped, the battledore dropped out of her hand, and from the midst of the porcelain fragments, and the faded sweetness of spiced rose-leaves, she drew a small bunch of withered violets, upon the shrunken stalks of which hung loosely a little pearl ring. There it lay where it had lain since the night of the princess's play—since Camilla, with hasty, guilty fingers, had thrust it in, while Dolly's pleading, trusting voice was ringing in her ears. "Not *quite* so bad; not *quite* so cruel as I thought," Dolly murmured, and a few warm tears fell upon the dead violets. Dead, indeed, and emblems of the faith upon which Dolly had hung her heart. Well, Dolly lived to bless the day when her flowers of spring had faded, her pearls been trampled underfoot.

What more? when Zinzan asked her to be his wife she did not say no. With every other girl of her time, she knew of no alternative besides marrying or dying, and, if trust and reverence were all she began with, love soon took root in so kindly a soil. Some time after, among the prim beauties of olden times, decorating the walls of St. Ann's, smiled a fairer face, the face of Dolly Zinzan, with happy hazel eyes, and calm brow. She

stood with one hand on the gray old sun-dial, and in the other, just such a fragrant posy pictured as that Grenville had given her on the first day of their acquaintance. Her life was very happy, and very peaceful; but she told her grandchildren in after days, that there were no such handsome, courtly men then as she remembered in her youth.

Miss Biddy Trulow never forgave "the little fool for marrying so starched a man as Zinzan, when she was so near breaking her heart for that dear rascal of a Ludlow!"

George Colthorp came home with all his legs and arms, and a lot of prize-money to boot; and Squire Meadowes, having resigned one daughter, magnanimously allowed another to make a "fool of herself."

When Dolly next saw Prissy she found her very much improved in appearance, and with small trace of her country manners left. She was as happy as possible, and ready to fancy herself an object of envy to all her acquaintance. And Joliffe ought to have been equally pleased, for he had all he had deemed necessary in a wife, and yet, perhaps, he did not find it as amusing after marriage as it had been before, to have, as a companion, one who never understood him by any chance, and had not an idea in common with him. Domestic life did not make him care less for his old friends, or part him from them; but he found his greatest enjoyment in conversing with clever women.

And now the end of the end has come; the last thread is wound off. Back, powdered and patched shades to your well-earned oblivion; tapping your antique snuff-boxes, swearing your heathen oaths! Gone—with all its gaming, and gaiety; with its fun, and cutting of capers; with gilt chariots, and outriders; with unpaved streets, and oil lamps; with silver ladles, and steaming bowls of punch; with Lady Di's long-handled fan, and Ludlow's diamond knee-buckles; with Nash's cream-coloured beaver; with stately minuets; handleless teacups; sedans and duelling—is the old, old Bath of George the Second's time.

THE END.

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